

EXPLORATIONS *of* FAITH

Studies of the Heroes of Faith in Hebrews 11

DOMENIC MARBANIANG

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DOMENIC MARBANIANG, Ph.D.

*Professor of Philosophy, Apologetics, Theology, & Religions,
Central India Theological Seminary, Itarsi, Central India.*

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Contents

Introduction

Beyond Uncertainty

Zero Reinterpreted

Effacing Evanescence

Climbing the Clouds

Ship without Sails

Unquenchable Flame

Great Salvation

Conclusion

Bibliography

to them that have obtained a like precious faith with us in the
righteousness of our God and *the* Saviour Jesus Christ...
(2Pt. 1:1)

Introduction

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews has been one of the most inspiring chapters of faith in the Bible throughout the history of Christianity. The book of Hebrews itself is the sacred saga of God's self-revealing of Himself as the salvation of the world through faith. The power of faith in God is indubitable. The horror of doubt is unimaginable. In *My Confession*,¹ Leo Tolstoy, the Russian novelist and former atheist, confessed that it was faith in God that finally brought true meaning into the confused and crumbling structure of his life. A few years before faith had come to his aid, his life had started to seem meaningless and absurd to him, a feeling that was almost destroying him from the inside. He felt that he had no reason to either live or do the things he was doing.

...five years ago, a strange state of mind began to grow upon me: I had moments of perplexity, of a stoppage, as it were, of life, as if I did not know how I was to live, what I was to do, and I began to wander, and was a victim to low spirits.... These stoppages of life always presented themselves to me with the same questions: "Why?" and "What after?"²

I was perfectly disconcerted, and knew not what to think. Another time, dwelling on the thought of how I should educate my children, I ask myself "Why?" Again, when considering by what means the well-being of the people might best be promoted, I suddenly exclaimed, "But what concern have I with it?" When I thought of the fame which my works were gaining me, I said to myself:

"Well, what if I should be more famous than Gogol, Pushkin, Shakespeare, Molière – than all the writers of the world – well, and what then?"...

¹ Leo Tolstoy "Doubts about the Meaning of Life," *Philosophy Looks to the Future*, Eds. Peyton E. Richter & Walter L. Fogg, 2nd edn. (Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc., 1978), pp. 62-68.

² *Ibid.* p. 62.

I could find no reply. Such questions will not wait: they demand an immediate answer... but answer there was none.

I felt that the ground on which I stood was crumbling, that there was nothing for me to stand on, that what I had been living for was nothing, that I had no reason for living....³

Tolstoy described this sense of meaninglessness as “some irresistible force” that was dragging him onward “to escape from life.” Many do try to escape this situation by indulging in materialistic pleasures or pursuits. Drugs, parties, shopping, television, games, etc provide easy means for escaping the seriousness of life. However, this indulgence is not without its boredom and vexation of spirit; while the flesh is being indulged in its passions, the spirit is suffocated. After much study of this problem, Tolstoy found that it was true faith in God alone that gave him meaning in life. He said,

I remembered that I had lived only when I believed in a God. As it was before, so it was now. I had only to know God, and I lived; I had only to forget Him, not to believe in Him, and I died.... To know God and to live are one. God is life.⁴

The question that Tolstoy didn’t attempt to answer was “Is there really a God?” To him, as well, as to many believers that is not the beginning point. The Swiss theologian Karl Barth said that the existence of God is not a thesis to be proved but a fact of revelation that has to be accepted by faith. The believer doesn’t believe simply that God exists: he believes in God. The confrontation with God through faith is the most real one because God Himself is the author

“Faith” in NT

The Greek New Testament uses the term *pistis* (πίστις) for “faith” which means “trust”, “strong belief”, “assurance”, “conviction”, “faith”, “persuasion”, “reliance”, and “fidelity”. The verbal form of it is *pisteuo* (πιστεύω), which means “to believe”, lit. “I believe.” The word “belief” is only used once in the KJV and is a translation of the word *pistis*. The New Testament doesn’t have a differentiation between belief and faith as we have in the English language, in which “faith” has a more religious tone and concerns a strong belief in God or one’s religious belief (one’s religion) though it is also used in other cases where strong belief is expressed.

³ Ibid, p. 63.

⁴ Ibid, p. 68.

and source of all reality. It is a matter of fact that the Bible doesn't begin with an attempt to prove God's existence: it begins with faith in God. But faith and truth must be properly connected or else the result would be false belief.

“Faith” in OT

The Hebrew word for “faith” is *emun* and means “credibility”, “trustworthiness”, “truth”, “that which is faithful”, and “that which is established as fact”. The feminine form of *emun* is *emunah* and is used in Habakkuk 2:4 where it says “the just shall live by faith (*emunah*).” *Emunah* has been interpreted variously as “faithfulness”, “set”, “truth”, “faithfully”, “faithful”, “faith”, “stability”, “steady”, “truly”, and “verily”. Obviously, the Jewish mind saw faith (*emun*) and truth (*emeth*) as intrinsically connected. Both are derived from the word *aman* (assurance, believe, bring up, be faithful, nurse, trust), which means properly “to build up or support” and “to foster as a parent or nurse” (Strong). The statement in Hebrews 1:1 that faith (*pistis*) is substance (*hypostasis*, support or ground) may have some relations to this meaning.

universe is evident from the fact that the Romans worshipped Faith as a goddess, honoring her with temples, altars, and sacred rites,⁵ as Augustine mentions. But this deifying of Faith desacralized it since all worldly instances of faith among humans would be referred to originating from her in the same manner that all instances of love were related to Eros or Cupid. Secondly, this deifying of Faith desacralizes faith in the sense that it finds its source and end in the

FAITH AND TRUTH

The faith of God (faith that is particularly related to God) is the most assured, trustworthy, irrefutable, truthful, and credible fact of Biblical experience. Therefore, the psalmist calls someone who denies God as a fool (Ps. 14:1). He is a fool not just in the sense of being unintelligent but in the sense of being wicked in sin since he knowingly denies what he irrefutably knows to be the truest fact, viz. the existence of God. He is also a fool because he thinks that by stating so he can escape the penetrating eyes of God. It is like a child who covers his eyes with his hands and then thinks no one is watching him.

The importance of faith as inevitable for any relation among humans and between them and the

⁵ Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Modern Library, 1950), p. 126.

4 | EXPLORATIONS OF FAITH

goddess herself and thus is rendered powerless to be the means of relating with the infinite and true God of all creation. Obviously, this Roman worship did signify in a sense the high value of faith in human society. However, Augustine rightly censured the deifying of it as being illogical, false, and vain. He calls faith as a part of justice, which is one of the four cardinal virtues, viz. prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance; and then questions why temples and altars were dedicated to faith but not to fortitude, temperance, and prudence. If someone answers that they need not be worshipped separately since they are worshipped in the form of the goddess Virtue. But, he asks, if they could so be worshipped in the form of Virtue (of which faith is a part but is still worshipped separately) then they could thus worship the true God also. In other words, if the Romans could worship all the different virtues as the goddess Virtue then they do not need so many deities after all. The worship of the only one God would suffice all. Thus, the deifying of faith was both irrational and meaningless.

But the deifying of faith as Faith didn't end with the Romans. It has emerged in the popular positive thinking philosophy that looks at faith as if it were a god or a deity, possessing infinite power to accomplish anything. Now positive thinking in relation to divine revelation is healthy. But positive thinking in relation to positive thinking itself is baseless. The Bible doesn't call us to faith in Faith but to faith in the truth of God; ultimately in God.

There is a popular saying in India that if one stubbornly believes a stone to be gold, it will become gold for him. I believe this is a dangerous belief that confuses truth with imagination. For instance, if a man boarded a train that was headed towards Chennai and kept on believing strongly that it is heading towards New Delhi; will the train change its direction just for the sake of his strong faith? What about the faith of the other passengers? Obviously, here faith deprived of truth is false. On the other hand, if there is a truth and it is not believed on, that truth becomes useless to the unbeliever. Thus, faith must be combined with truth in order to be productive. Therefore, the writer of Hebrews says regarding the Israelites: "For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it" (Heb. 4:2).

Faith, obviously, then is only productive when it is faith in the truth. While faith in temporal truths (like faith in the laws of physics or in some economic theory) has only temporal value (i.e. as long as one remains in this world or as long as this world remains); faith in the truth of God has eternal value and significance.

3 LAWS OF LOGIC

According to Aristotle, there were three laws fundamental to logic:

Law of Identity. A thing has essentially one identity. E.g. A rose is a rose ($A=A$).

Law of Non-Contradiction. The essential opposite of thing can never be the same as the thing. E.g. A rose is not equal to a not-rose ($A \neq \text{not-}A$).

Law of Excluded Middle. A thing is either what it is claimed to be or not that thing. E.g. A rose is either a rose or not a rose (Either A or not-A).

There are many faiths in this world. That doesn't mean that all of them are true. For when two statements contradict each other, either one or both of them are false. They can't be true at the same time. For instance, if I say that my pen has only blue ink and someone else says that my pen has only black ink, we have run into a contradiction. For since I said that it has *only* blue ink, it cannot have any other color of ink. Either I or the other person is right; or both are wrong (the pen may have

red ink); but both cannot be true at the same time. Similarly, there are many differences in belief about God, man, and the universe. Either one of them is true or none of them is true. This is an undeniable assumption behind all valid reasoning.

Pluralism and Exclusivity of Truth

Pluralism, or the belief that all religions are equally valid ways to God or ultimate reality, has become an attractive philosophy in our times. This is so because pluralism seems to facilitate religious toleration and peace among people of different faiths. Certainly, the rise of militant religious sects and fundamentalist movements has created more terror and pain than peace among humans. It is disheartening to see that religion has become more a trouble-making element than a spirit-healing medium in modern times. Each group or sect claims to possess the truth and this orthodox holding on to belief is what is said to generate intolerance among people.

Therefore, some have opted for pluralism as the better answer. However, pluralism fails to accord with the logical law of non-

6 | EXPLORATIONS OF FAITH

contradiction stated earlier. Two opposing beliefs cannot be equally true. However, some will say that they can be equally justifiable.

That is to say, one is justified in believing certain things if his reasons for believing it are justified in his eyes. This is to reduce faith to mere subjectivity, a problem which we illustrated earlier with the example of the man on the train. Faith segregated from truth can be both useless and dangerous. The law of non-contradiction must apply to truth. Even pluralism must accept this to maintain its assertion that its claims are true (implying that views opposite to it are false). Therefore, pluralism cannot be considered to be philosophically sound.

Criteria for Truth

One cannot also absolutely state that there is no way to measure the truthfulness of religious beliefs. Of course, some philosophers known as the logical positivists held that since religious beliefs were empirically unverifiable, they were meaningless or empty of meaning and therefore signified nothing. However, this view is self-conflicting since this principle of logical positivism itself is not empirically verifiable. There must be a way to measure the truth or else truth will have no meaning. The question is what is that measuring rod?

Philosophers generally agree on a set of laws as criteria of truth like the law of internal consistency (truth must not be self-contradictory), the law of correspondence (truth must correspond to reality), the pragmatic law (truth must be successful in the end; it must work), and the law of coherence (a statement of truth must cohere with other statements of truth). For instance, it is evident that the tribal belief about the sun being a god who needs blood to rise up in the morning neither corresponds to reality nor coheres with the set of scientific discoveries (not hypotheses) known to us. Therefore, it is a false belief. Similarly, the view that God is everything and everything is God (pantheism) involves internal inconsistency since by calling everything God, not only the distinctness of God is lost but also truth as opposed to falsehood is lost to this “everything”. Likewise, the view that all experience is an illusion since plurality is false and reality is one (monism) fails all the tests since it neither corresponds to experienced reality nor is internally consistent (all is

one is utterance possible only if more than two exist, at least the speaker and the statement) nor does it have any pragmatic value, added to its lack of coherence with available data. Polytheistic beliefs have largely been proven as mythical, failing the correspondence and coherence tests, in addition to the difficulty involved in grounding these beliefs into some explanatory framework: pantheism and monism have been tried in India.⁶ Other religious beliefs like beliefs about man, the universe, morality, and salvation can be evaluated in this manner.

However, mere religious belief and faith in God must be distinguished from each other. While religious belief is belief in a set of doctrinal statements, faith in God is a personal commitment to and reliance on God. Religious belief can be strong and orthodox owing to one's strong binding with the religious community and submission to such authority or feelings of communalism. However, the justification for such beliefs is never found in an encounter with the truth of God. Faith, on the other hand, has only to do with statements of belief and forms of religiosity in so far as they make the relationship with God meaningful. Faith is primarily related to God in His self-revelation. It is not mere belief that such and such statement is true but is a commitment to God by the acceptance of the truth of God. One may believe, for instance, the statement "God exists" and yet not submit to Him in faith. The expression "believe that God", therefore, is not the same as "believe God". For instance, James says "You *believe that* there is one God, you do well; even the demons believe and tremble" (Jas. 2:19, MKJV; italics mine). Then again he says "Abraham *believed God*, and it was imputed to him for

TESTS FOR TRUTH

Law of Internal Consistency

A statement should not contradict itself.

Law of Correspondence

A statement should correspond to reality.

Law of Coherence

A statement must cohere with other statements of truth.

Law of Pragmatism

Truth should work (e.g. a scientific theory is true if it

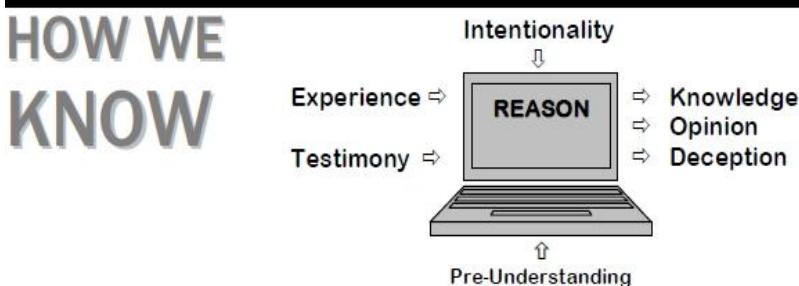
⁶ The reader must understand that the analysis given here is brief and cannot deal with the many different explanations and defensive arguments of the different positions. Such a treatment of the subject will require another work. The above are only simple samples. The reader himself, if honest, can make his own assessment regarding the truth of such beliefs.

righteousness" (Jas. 2:23, MKJV; italics again mine). Religious beliefs about creeds and traditions, therefore, cannot amount to faith in God. Those beliefs do not imply a relationship with God. But if one has faith in God that faith revolutionizes one's total life since it connects him to God. This is the faith which the writer of Hebrews talks about in chapter 11 and which we seek to understand. But before we do that let's take an overview of how beliefs, truth, and reality are related to each other. This, however, will be a little tedious one to some who do not wish to bother themselves with philosophical stuff. In such a case, the reader may skip to the next section without much loss if he or she wishes to and may come back to this whenever he or she likes.

THE GRID OF INTERPRETATION

All knowledge is the product of interpretation. Every interpretation is governed by pre-understanding. Pre-understanding is composed of pre-beliefs. For instance, when the islanders of Melita saw a viper curled around Paul's hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, being saved from the sea, Justice has not allowed to live" (Ac. 28:4). Their interpretation of the event was based on several pre-beliefs like the belief in Justice (as a god perhaps), the belief that murder is unjust, and that Justice will never absolve anyone. However, when later they found out that Paul had neither been infected nor killed by the viper, they decided that he was a god. Their conclusion followed from the implicit belief that only a god could survive a viper's bite. These pre-beliefs formed their pre-understanding and governed their interpretation of the event. Such pre-beliefs themselves are products of earlier interpretation. A set of beliefs regarding the world, man, God, life, and morality makes a world-view. Thus, one's world-view is the framework in which one tries to understand newer things which are soon assimilated in that world-view to modify it. The chief sources of beliefs are direct perception (sense-experience, intuition, and feeling) and verbal testimony (hearsay, literature, oral traditions, etc). The process of interpreting direct perception and verbal testimony in order to form either opinion or belief is inference. Opinion is the result of incomplete interpretation. Belief is the result of complete interpretation. Opinion is based on guesswork and

speculation to fill the gap of information required to finish the process of inference. Belief is based on inference from data considered to be sufficient for the interpretation. When the process of inference is faulty, the resulting belief will be false. But given the conditions that the pre-beliefs (premises) are true and the inference faultless, the resulting belief will be true. False belief is related to unreality since what is believed is not real. True belief is related to reality. Opinion is intermediate since it is incomplete inference. True belief is known as truth.



Reason - Central Data Processing Unit (Mind with basic categories of data interpretation)

Experience - Source of primary or first-hand data (knowing something) – includes both sense-data and internal sensations such as feelings, emotions, etc.

Testimony - Source of secondary data (knowing about something)

Pre-understanding – Formerly processed data that acts as database (may be false or true depending on the integrity of processing and the genuineness of either experience or hearsay or both).

Intentionality – The will-to-believe functionality of the heart. Determiner of the direction of the process (One believes what one wants to believe).

Knowledge – Knowledge of the truth about something which is true belief.

Opinion – Intermediate position which is unconfirmed supposition about something.

Deception – Result of faulty processing either due to fallacious reasoning or due to intentional *eisogenesis*. Deception is false belief.

All inference is based on reason. Reason is the logical foundation of inference or reasoning. Reason doesn't provide the data for belief or opinion: it provides the rationally irrefutable assumptions (or rules) of inference: e.g. the law of causality, the law of calculation (quantity, number), the law of necessary relation, etc. When one tries to force reason to provide data for interpretation, the result is absurdity; because it can only provide the rules and not the data for interpretation. For instance, we all lack the empirical data (from direct perception) to infer the size of the universe. However, if one turned to reason from experience to imaginatively speculate the size of the universe, one would draw the nonsensical conclusion that the universe is neither finite nor infinite; because the mind can neither conceive an infinite universe nor a finite one. If you don't believe me then try imagining first that the universe is finite (or has a boundary); you can't, since the mind says there must be something or at least some empty space beyond that boundary. But then, again try imagining the universe as infinite; you can't, since the infinite cannot be limited in any conception in order to imagine the infinite one must infinitely keep imagining it because infinity surpasses boxed imagination. But since the universe, unlike transcendent concepts or ideas,⁷ is an object of spatio-temporal sense-experience, its infinity cannot be imagined. Thus, the resultant conclusion is absurd. However, some rationalists such as the Hindu non-dualists

ZENO'S ARROW

The 5th c. Greek philosopher Zeno of Elea defended monism on the basis of rational arguments that demonstrated the incompatibility of reason with experience. One of his arguments called the paradox of the flying arrow argued that since an arrow can only occupy space by being at rest in relation to certain points in space, it cannot logically fly. For if it flew then it could not be at rest and if it were not at rest it could not be said to occupy space. The appearance of a flying arrow, therefore, is rationally false though experientially true. This is the paradox of it.

⁷ By transcendent concepts is meant concepts that are unempirical, i.e. they are not objects of experience and so cannot be empirically verified. These include the rules of logic, the ideas of reason (like causality, infinity, relation, negation), and the idea of an infinite God. This is not to argue that the ideas are proof of their real existence but to say that their rational conception is possible and also necessary for rational explanation of this universe.

(monist)⁸ have accepted this to be true, thus denying the reality of everything we experience. Obviously, then to avoid such absurdity one must not look to reason as the source of beliefs but only as the provider of the rules of inference. Similarly, the result of illogical or irrational interpretation of empirical data leads to false conclusions. For instance, I see a little boy eating a banana; then I see a monkey eating a banana; I conclude that there is no difference between the boy and the monkey because both of them eat bananas. The conclusion is false because there is no necessary relation between the two phenomena: a banana is not a necessary relation. However, if I see smoke rising from a nearby building, I immediately infer from it that there must be fire there; because smoke and fire are causally related. Thus, experience and reason must work together to produce knowledge. However, it is also true that most of our beliefs are not based on direct experience. We learn them from our parents, friends, teachers, books, TV, movies, etc. They are secondary information. All such information is processed by the interpretive grid of the mind as it seeks to relate it to the already existing framework of beliefs. The processing of new information leads to the modification of the framework by correction, development, or strengthening of the existing knowledge. However, one's intentionality can sometimes interfere in the right processing of the information, in which case the interpretation may lead to twisted meaning and distorted truth.

Faith and Knowledge

Obviously, one's way of looking at life is largely determined by one's pre-understanding. It influences one's way of thinking.

One's framework of beliefs, or worldview, determines to a great extent one's interpretation of reality; for reality is never taken as it is – all belief is interpreted reality since reality by itself and in itself lacks meaning. Meaning is always found in a relation of things; that relating of things is interpretation. But meaning imposed (*eisogenesis*) is not true meaning; for instance, a man may see a man picking a candy from a store and say he was stealing it, when in fact he may

⁸ The non-dualists don't agree to be called as monists since the term 'monism' is positive while non-dualists negate everything: they don't say "all is one" but say "a dual doesn't exist".

be the owner of the store. Meaning discovered (*exegesis*) is the only true meaning. False beliefs can lead to false conclusions. For instance, to an atheistic existentialist this universe is absurd, human life is absurd, and all toil is an illogical enterprise.

ATHEISTIC WORLD-VIEW

The atheistic world-view includes the following beliefs:

1. Belief that there is no God or any supernatural entity.
2. Belief that there is no life after death; that a man is annihilated at death.
3. Belief that the universe is eternal.
4. Belief that conscience is a human construct, learnt by social education.
5. Belief that there is no absolute morality; no good and evil.
6. Belief that man is a product of matter and chance.
7. Belief that life has no final meaning.
8. Belief that the world has no final purpose, that everything is propelled by blind chance and matter.

the atheistic grid of interpretation was modified. The modifying atheistic worldview took many forms: nihilism, fascism, Marxism, evolutionism, scientism, existentialism, etc. Thus, beliefs determine interpretation until the framework itself is doubted and a revolution in the pattern of thinking is secured, as we saw what happened in Tolstoy's life.

There are several different worldviews in the world: e.g. Hindu *karmic* worldview, Hindu reformed worldview, Buddhist worldview, spiritualist worldview, occult worldview, liberal worldview, Pentecostal worldview, secular worldview, MTV culture worldview, etc. Each way of looking at life is distinct in itself. Each framework has developed its own method of contextual interpretation as well. Here we see two aspects of interpretation: rational and contextual. While rational interpretation is absolute involving the laws of reason, contextual interpretation is relative, i.e. relative to the framework; for instance, the *karmic* interpretation of time, liberal interpretation of the Bible, etc.

Such plurality of interpretive grids makes pluralism very attractive. But pluralism, or the belief that all belief-systems are

However, the worldview of an atheist is itself composed of several beliefs that are the result of interpretation – mainly of secondary information (i.e. chiefly through mimesis, i.e. imitation of popular beliefs or flowing with the cultural milieu). The historical development of the atheistic cultural milieu in the Universities needs no particular reference here. It all took impetus from the Enlightenment as we know. With each new interpretation,

valid ways in themselves, is an interpretive grid that attempts to overrule the others without their consent. Therefore, its ruling is objected by most who deny their way as equal to the others. Test of correspondence, coherence, consistency, and pragmatic value do help to a great extent; however, their significance is overruled by particular world-views; for instance, the non-dualist view admits neither the reality of the phenomenal world nor the effability (able to be expressed in words) of ultimate reality; thus, disannulling all the above stated tests of truth. But none of the views can violate the fundamental laws of logic without violating themselves. For instance, the law of non-contradiction doesn't exist, I at the same time deny myself the right to make such a statement since by making that statement I assume that its contradictory statement "the law of non-contradiction" exists is false. But to accept such opposites is to assume the law of non-contradiction which was being denied earlier. Thus, this law is inescapable. Even if someone said that knowledge is not mental but transcends the logical limits of the mind and so cannot be expressed in language, such assertion itself assumes the law of non-contradiction; thus, the fundamental nature of rational rules is established.

Inconsistency or incoherence within the framework due to an acquirement or realization of a particular truth can cause doubt

MIND GAMES

Truth & Meaningfulness

A sentence is defined as a group of words that makes sense. See if you can find the following statements meaningful:

1. "I never speak the truth."
2. "This second quote is false."
3. "Maya is neither existent nor non-existent."

Clues:

1. How do you know if what the speaker just said is true or false since he claims to never speak the truth? If the statement is true then it is false that he never speaks the truth, which is self-contradiction.
2. The second quote is itself. Does the statement communicate anything to qualify as true or false?
3. Maya is the power of Brahman's self-delusion in Advaitin Hinduism which teaches that nothing exists except Brahman. However, if nothing exists then why do we see this universe as plural? It is by the power of Maya they say. However, if Maya exists then a duality is already present and Brahman is not alone; therefore, Maya is not existent. But, if it is not existent then it can have no power; therefore, it is not non-existent. Can you understand what it means to be neither existent nor non-existent? Does the statement make any sense to you?

eventually leading to a faith-crisis. This faith-crisis is helpful, if accompanied by honesty, to revolutionize one's way of thinking. However, one may also choose to be committed to the prior belief-system and reject the truth that now presents to him by suppressing it or trying to destroy it. But when mixed with truthfulness (honesty), faith-crisis can lead to truth. Thus, doubt when accompanied by a will-to-meaning propels investigation and facilitates openness to truth.

Rationality of belief is a fundamental responsibility of man. For that determines the nature of his decisions. True faith is never irrational (i.e., in conflict with itself and in conflict with rational acceptability), though not limited by reason. Common faith, however, is quite different from the faith of God as will be seen. In fact, the faith of God is more rational (coherent to one's framework of knowledge and convincing to the heart) than the rationality of other beliefs. That is the reason why the writer of Hebrews says that faith in God is substance and evidence; not just conjecture and interpretation

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

1. To not have faith in God, the Bible says, is to be foolish not only because it is moral dishonesty but also because if one can't believe in God then one doesn't have any rational reason to believe in anything else.
2. Truth that is not believed in is useless; belief that is not true can be dangerous!
3. If truth was as diverse as tastes are then courts of justice, legislative bodies, and universities would go berserk as rules of logic and all speech become meaningless.
4. Faith in God necessarily requires commitment to Him.

CHAPTER ONE

Beyond Uncertainty

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Heb. 11:1)

The chapter begins with the statement, “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” The Greek word for faith used here is *pistis* (“strong belief,” “persuasion,” “conviction”) but it seems to reflect the Hebraic idea of *emun* or *emunah* (from Heb. *aman* meaning “to build up or support”; *emeth*, “truth”, is another derivative of it). This *pistis* (*emun*) is not just undeniably related to the truth (*emeth*) of God but is also the ground and support (*aman*) of all spiritual experiences, as we will see shortly. Obviously, what the writer here has in mind is true faith in God and His revelation. It is not blind faith or herd-mentality faith.⁹ Faith in God is of ultimate kind and is, therefore, both unique and absolute. Since it is not concerned with contingent things of this world it is also not like the belief in the contingent things of the world. Further, belief in God is foundational to our common-sense assumptions about this world as both moral and rational. Anyone who denies God must also deny the existence of absolute morals and absolute truth, for both lose their foundation if their foundation is found within this world itself. It would be like trying to place a ball on that ball itself. Without an unchangeable transcendent ground, there can be no absolute point of reference (as in outer space where all bodies hang in positions relative to each other). The unchanging nature and character of God is the foundation of true morality¹⁰ and His veracity is the foundation of all

⁹ Socrates said that “the life which is unexamined is not worth living.” Plato, *The Republic and Other Works*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York: Anchor Books, 1989), p. 466.

¹⁰ This is not the same as saying that the difference between right and wrong is due to God’s fiat, a thesis that Bertrand Russell tried to rebut (Richter & Fogg, *Philosophy Looks to the Future*, p. 382). It means to say that moral goodness is ultimately based on the eternally unchanging character of God and everything that

reasonability and truth. Therefore, divine existence is the surest fact of reality as the psalmist also says that it is only the fool who says in his heart that there is no God (Ps. 14:1). Since God is the final cause, ground, and reason of this universe and all human experience, faith in God is also final and ultimate. It is this reason why God can accept no excuse for unbelief from the unbeliever. For the faith of God (Mk. 11:22)¹¹ is both distinctive and final; it is the ground of the ultimate form of experience which is divinely given.

BETWEEN NOW AND ETERNITY

In the Greek (in which the New Testament was written), the order of words gives emphasis to “things hoped for”.¹² These “things” are firstly, “hoped for”, but also “not seen” as Paul clearly explains it to the Romans that “hope that is seen is not hope: for who hopeth for that which he seeth?” (Rom. 8:24, ASV).

Hope is defined as “expectation and desire”,¹³ thus, “to hope” signifies wanting something to happen and believing in its possibility. Thus believing and hoping are connected as the now to the future. We believe in the present what we hope about the future; the future being invisible at the present. The future possesses the goal and meaning that integrates our present life and gives us a reason to move forward. Thus, faith is that which binds history together with meaning. One tends to look at history as general and particular. General history deals with the history of the world: its origin (also including the origin of time), its progress, and its destiny. Here, we are not just talking about History as a study-discipline but history as the whole of events in general – past,

is morally good is in so far as it conforms to God’s character. For instance, falsehood is evil because God cannot lie and there is no falsehood in Him: not just because He has commanded us not to lie. In such case, we do not say that God is above good and evil but that God is the embodiment and reality of ultimate goodness; evil is His opposite and therefore against Him.

¹¹ The Greek word θεοῦ used here means ‘of God’.

¹² Ἐστι δὲ πίστις ἐλπίζομένων ύπόστασις. Observe that ἐλπίζομένων (of things hoped for) precedes ύπόστασις (substance). Greek grammar discerns subject and predicate by the endings of words and not their placement in the sentence. The placement often intends emphasis on the word placed first.

¹³ *The Little Oxford Dictionary*, rev. 7th edn. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

present, and future. Particular or specific history, on the other hand, deals with some particular object like a people, phenomenon, or an individual: thus, we have Indian history, history of religion, and autobiographies. According to the Bible, general history is not absurd but intrinsically and teleologically meaningful. In other words, it is through and thoroughly meaningful to the end. Its processes are meaningful and its end is also meaningful because the processes are controlled by God and the end is determined by God. Therefore, every event that occurs in history can measure its significance by referring to God's general purpose for His creation. This does not proclaim the teaching of determinism or fatalism but of the judicious governance of this world by God. To fall short of God's will and purpose means to lose the true meaning of life and degrade to inauthentic existence – a life that is not seriously concerned with its reality and focus or one that suppresses the truth of God by giving in to the faith-destroying voices of unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18). This kind of life has two kinds of responses towards the future: false hope and hopelessness. False hope is hoping in things that are unreal in the sight of God; for instance, the hope of the demons to defeat God. This is a false hope because it is not based on a reality sanctioned by God. Their faith, therefore, lacks a solid basis and their hope has no real anchor. It is also, therefore, both useless and dangerous. Obviously, false faith leads to false hopes.

Answer to Hopelessness

Another kind of response is seen in the sense of hopelessness. It is the single-most greatest assailant of joy in modern times. In the absence of hope, people lose all sense of living. The fact is that when faith is renounced, hope is also lost with it. When one can't believe anything, one can also expect nothing. I think that's the reason why our present (postmodern) age of relative truths and values has lead to more sighs of despair than ever. With nothing to hold on to and no solid ground to stand on, there remains no sure

3 FUTURE OUTLOOKS

False Hope – Hoping for things that don't exist in the future

Hopelessness – Looking at life with despair.

Faith - Holding on to the things that God has already established in the future.

expectation left. The euphoria of relativity only leads to the evaporation of hope because the uncertainty of present is chained to the uncertainty of future. Faith in absolutes provides the rail track for the train of action to move on towards the destiny of hope, towards ‘things hoped for’. Thus, faith is the substance or ground of things hoped for. An example of this is found in the life of the Preacher in Ecclesiastes. Reporting his frustration with a life lived without divine reference, merely ‘under the sun’ (a phrase that signifies a materialistic and godlessly rationalistic lifestyle), he writes:

“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.” What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun? ...I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.... I tried cheering myself with wine.... I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself.... made gardens and park.... made reservoirs.... owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem.... amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces.... Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.... So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me (Eccl. 1:2, 14; 2:3, 4-8, 11, 17, NIV).

To this writer, most probably King Solomon, a loosening of faith in God led to spiritual bankruptcy and life lost its ultimate focus. Terrestrially speaking, this world had no final meaning for him once death took him into its bosom. To the materialistic mind there is no difference between the death of an animal and the death of a man. One may believe in the spirit and its survival after death but his materialistic orientation breeds more frustration than hope.

Man’s fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless (Eccl. 3:19, NIV).

Thus, when ultimate faith is lost, ultimate hopes also evaporate. Therefore, the Preacher admonishes the young to remember God and submit to Him in reverence in the blossom of youth, before old age

dawns on them with feelings of worthlessness and a wasted life (Eccl. 12:1, 13, 14).

Another clear example of the relation between faith and hope is found in the book of Job. Job was a sincerely devout and pious believer. However, Satan finding occasion came before God and accused him of utilitarianism (that Job feared God only because God provided for and protected him). God allowed the trial of Job. One thing to note here is that God allows trials into the lives of His children not to destroy and debase them but to prove that their faith is pure. If we can believe that then the devil is plundered and victory is ours. In the case of Job, the devil's main accusation was that Job was a utilitarian; he followed God because God gave him what he wanted. In other words, he wanted to say that Job's faith was not spiritual but natural and carnal. According to him, Job honored God for natural and carnal reasons and not because he loved God in spirit and in truth. Such response is animalistic, instinctive, and natural. Even a dog is faithful to its master. The nature or being of God didn't matter much to him. What God did for him was more important to him than who God was.

Bluntly, the devil was saying that God was not being worshipped because He was worthy of it but because people were getting their fill of desires. Once these materialistic blessings were removed, he said, Job would turn against and curse God to His face (Job 1:11). Even Job's wife agreed to this as the expected response for misery (Job 2:9). But Job did not flicker because he knew that though circumstances might change, the nature and being of God is beyond the shadow of a change, and that his faith was anchored not in the appearance of circumstances but in the constancy of God. His faith was not a response of the flesh that sought physical motivation to go on; it was the ground of his existence. Therefore, he says "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15).¹⁴ If Job didn't have

2 KINDS OF WORSHIP

FALSE WORSHIP

Worship in order to gain something. It is animalistic, carnal, natural, and utilitarian

TRUE WORSHIP

Worship out of love for God for who He is. It is spiritual and real.

¹⁴ KJV. The NIV reads "yet will I hope in him." The Hebrew word *yachal* means to wait, to trust, to tarry, and to hope.

faith in the truthfulness and faithfulness of God, suffering for him would have been both pointless and absurd. Everything would be madness. But it was faith in God that infused in him a hope for the future. However, this hope was not of some materialistic, utilitarian fulfillment but of a spiritual encounter with God Himself. As he says,

I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes – I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me! (Job 19:25-27, NIV).

Apparently, it is not just a hope of resurrection that is expressed here: it is the hope of seeing God “with my own eyes”. Job’s faith was not based on space-time instances, but on the eternal reality of God Himself, a vision that connected his now to eternity.

THE CERTAINTY OF FAITH

The Greek word for “substance” used here is *hypostasis* (ὑπόστασις), from which is derived our English word “hypostasis”, which means, in metaphysics, “essential nature or underlying reality.” Literally, it meant “that which is placed under”, that is the ground beneath something on which the thing gains a firm foothold. It is in this sense that the Septuagint (LXX) uses it for “standing” in Psalm 69:2, where the psalmist says, “I sink in deep mire, where *there is* no standing,”¹⁵ or place for the foot to rest. The word is used five times in the New Testament; thrice as “assurance” or “confidence”, once as “person” or “essential nature”, and once, i.e. here, as “substance”. Obviously, a word can be used in more than one sense, as for instance the word “ground” in the English language can be used to mean “the surface of the earth”, “a piece of land”, e.g. a playground, “the basis for some action or belief”, e.g. moral grounds or grounds for belief, or “a preliminary coat of paint applied to a surface”, among many other things.

¹⁵ The Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) renders it as ἐνεπάγην εἰς ἵλιν βυθοῦ, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ὑπόστασις.

I believe that the three basic meanings of the Greek word *hypostasis* may together help us to understand a greater import of the text. The three forms are as follows:

Faith is the ground or basis of things hoped for.

Faith is the substance of things hoped for.

Faith is the assurance or confidence of things hoped for.

Faith as Foundation

Firstly, faith is “the ground of things hoped for.” It is on the basis of faith alone that God can give to us what He desires to give us. However, faith can only be a basis because of God’s Word (Truth of God). The faith that is not based on God’s Word is not foundational about the things of God. It leads to somewhere else. But the faith that is connected to God’s Word is the ground for experiencing the things of God. There are many instances in the Scriptures that illustrate this truth. The Israelites perished in the wilderness and couldn’t enter the Promised Land due to their unbelief (Jude 5). Moses could not enter the Promised Land because of his unbelief in the word of God (Num. 20:12; disobedience is a form of unbelief). Jesus could not do many miracles in Nazareth because of their unbelief (Mk. 6:5, 6; Mt. 13:58). Scripture tells us that those who do not believe in Jesus Christ will not be saved (Mk. 16:16). It is on the basis of faith that we receive healing (Mt. 9:22), salvation (Eph. 2:8), the promise of the Spirit (Gal. 3:14), and eternal inheritance (Ac. 26:18). Obviously, faith is the inevitable condition for the appropriation of divine gifts, not because God is incapable of acting without our faith but because faith is the spiritual relation between a heart that willingly receives and the heart that willingly gives. However, the text also has a second implication: that faith is the ground upon which things are hoped for. We can only hope of better things because we have, first, faith. As has already been seen earlier, if I can’t believe in someone, I can’t hope anything from him. I can’t

OBJECT OF FAITH

GOD

Ultimate object of faith and of all knowledge.

THINGS OF GOD

One doesn’t believe in the things but believes in God and His promises about the things.

have hopes of victory, for instance, from an army that I don't believe to be capable of victory. Without faith there is no hope, without hope there is no vision, without vision there is no strength, and without strength there is no thrust. In other words, faith determines a lifestyle by providing both vision and inspiration, and also a reason to live.

1. Faith as Ontological Basis of Spiritual Blessings. By ontological basis is meant that it is not just a mental assent but is also a real and solid basis for spiritual blessings. In fact, faith connects knowledge of truth with the reality of the truth itself. In that sense, it is the basis of the things hoped for. Faith is a real act of commitment to the truth, a space-time event that pierces through time to eternity. Therefore, an act of faith has inevitable results. When Moses acted out in faith on God's word and struck the Red sea, it was inevitable that it split into two parts. When the blind man obeyed Jesus and washed his eyes in the pool of Siloam, it was inevitable that his eyes be opened. This is so because faith is the basis of things hoped for. The faith of God is an act directly related to God and not this space-time world; therefore, it pierces through space-time and catches hold of the hem of God's garment unleashing His power and blessings in this temporal frame. That is why miracles are possible, despite the general laws of nature. Peter walked on water by the faith of God that sees God as the Lord of creation and not limited by its phenomenal functions, its natural laws, or the way things happen. God is the source of all created reality and all phenomena owe their existence to God. His infinite power spans the difference between being and non-being and brings things out of nothing. Therefore, He is Lord of all creation. For God, nothing is impossible. An act of faith connects to the will and power of God. Therefore, Jesus said, "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed...nothing shall be impossible to you" (Mt. 17:20); for through faith what is possible to God is also possible to the believer.

2. Faith as Epistemic Basis of Spiritual Experiences. Faith not only connects to the will and power of God; it also connects to the knowledge of God. It is both mental consent and commitment to the truth proclaimed by God. Therefore, it is the epistemic basis of spiritual knowledge. The experience of faith is the experience of divine truth. This is very obvious in the Scriptural assertion that the natural or carnal man cannot receive the things of God (1Cor. 2:14).

They have no personal significance for him. There were many people who saw and heard Jesus during His physical ministry in this world; however, it was very few who really believed and, consequently, experienced Him. Let's compare two perspectives here: the first, of the high priest and the second, of Jesus' disciple, John:

- (1) And the high priest answered and said unto him, "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus saith unto him, "Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, "He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy" (Mt. 27:63-65).
- (2) And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth (Jn. 1:14).

The contrary experiences of the high priest (feelings of desperation, fury, anguish, discomfort, and rage) were governed by his refusal to believe the confession of Christ. He could never know Christ because he could not believe Him. On the other hand, John saw Jesus as the Son of God who came and dwelled among us. The high priest accused Him of blasphemy; but John saw Him as being full of grace and truth. The high priest could not know God because of his unbelief. Thus, faith is considered to be essential to knowledge. To know means also to believe. This is very true also in relation to statements about this temporal world. For instance, if someone says that he knows that the earth is spherical, it also means that he believes the earth to be spherical. Further, knowledge is composed of truth; therefore, knowing something means also to believe in the truth about that thing. To believe in falsehood does not constitute knowledge. For instance, one may believe that the earth is flat, but since this belief doesn't correspond to reality therefore, it is obvious that this person doesn't really know what the earth is like but is, on the other hand, deceived about it. False belief doesn't constitute knowledge; it constitutes ignorance and deception. True belief alone, therefore, is knowledge. Evidently, then belief is

elemental to knowledge. There is a difference between sensory experience and spiritual knowledge because spiritual knowledge is not given to us in the form of sense-perception but must be received on the basis of faith alone. For instance, the knowledge of Christ's atonement on the cross is not derived from a sense-observation of the crucifixion – there were many who saw the crucifixion but only few who truly understood it. It is based on faith in God's revelation and a communication of this conviction to the heart of the believer by the Spirit of God. Therefore, the nature of this revelation is spiritual, transcending all limitations of language and thought though not contradicting them. Evidently, then, faith is the basis of spiritual experiences. Therefore, the Scripture says:

Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God (1Cor. 2:9- 10).

Faith as Substance

Secondly, faith is “the substance of things hoped for.” In other words, the things that we hope for are, at present, composed of and given to us as faith. Therefore, whenever we have faith we also have the things we hope for in the form of faith now. That is why Jesus said “Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours” (Mk. 11:24). He doesn't ask them to believe that they will receive it in future but to believe that they have already received it in faith. In other words, if someone has faith in God for something, he already has that thing. I believe this is so because God is not conditioned by time but if something is “yes” in Him then it is eternally “yes” and the same in future, present, and past. Thus, it is not whether that thing will be real to us in the future but whether it is already real in the sight of God that is significant. We may have those things later on, but if God has already said a “yes”, then there is no doubting about their reality which we experience in the form of faith. Faith itself, thus, becomes the evidence, as we shall see later, of things yet unseen. But more than just being evidence, faith is the fact of our having what we are hoping for. It is in this spirit that we know that we are the children of God, that our citizenship is in

heaven, and that the devil is a defeated foe. Obviously, all these facts will be physically manifest only at the last day but they are readily known as facts by us now without any doubt. That is faith: to know the future in the present as true. Therefore, a man of faith doesn't live his life regretting about the past or worrying about his present but he is elated by faith to see the hopes of the distant future as a timeless reality and lives his life in accordance to the reality of those facts in the sight of God (Phil. 3:7-10). That is one reason why unbelief in God's revelation is sin; because it attempts to falsify God (1Jn. 5:10). It attempts to deny what is true and undeniable in the sight of God. Therefore, the unbelievers cannot inherit the kingdom of God since they cannot see it and know it now. Weighing the ultimate value of spiritual faith, it has infinitely greater value than the temporary escapism of drug hallucinations, day-dream fantasies, and entertainment. These may provide temporary escape from the inescapable void of the future inherent in the blank realities of the present that the unbeliever experiences, but can't liberate the soul in reality, engendering more vexation of spirit than peace. Life, as a result, becomes more banal, confused, and dissatisfying. But faith connects the life of the believer to the eternal realities of God and, therefore, his spiritual experiences possess the value of a far greater reality that the world can't counterfeit.

Faith as Conviction

Finally, faith is "the assurance of things hoped for." The assurance or certainty of faith is based on the finality of its object. Finality refers to that which is both foundational and terminal. By foundational is meant that which is basic and necessary. Terminal refers to that which is the end and finality of something, its destiny. Now, it is evident that God is the foundation and terminal of faith since He is the Beginning and the End of all reality; for everything consists and subsists by Him (Isa. 41:4; 48:12; Col. 1:7; Rev. 21:6). In other words, all that is real and true has its source in Him and has Him as its final end as the Word says about the Son of God "he is before all things, and by him all things consist" (Col. 1:17). This world cannot be the final source and end of faith since it is contingent and therefore not final in itself. Secondly, since we ourselves are part of this world, to trust in this world would amount

to trusting in nothing (objective); for, it would be like a man trying to walk on his boots. Therefore, God alone is the foundation and end of faith. Faith begins and ends in Him. It is the reality of God where the world finally collides and comes to an end. There is nothing conceivable by reason, experience, or faith beyond Him. Therefore, the faith of God is final. As seen earlier, God's finality for faith is also seen in His not just being the beginning and the end of all things but also in His being the only eternal, infinite, all sufficient, unchanging, absolute, necessary, and relational being. The last attribute, relationality, is essential for faith to be able to relate to God and find its finality in Him. Relationality means that God has an infinite relational possibility, implying also His eternity of relation to someone. If God didn't have such eternal relation then relationality would not be an essential attribute of Him. But if relationality were not an essential attribute of God then faith cannot in anyway relate to Him in reality or essentially. Therefore, relationality must be an essential attribute of God for faith to be possible. However, relationality cannot be an eternal attribute of either a finite deity (polytheism) or monad deity (unitarianism); the former is not eternal or infinite and the latter has no relations except after the creation of this world, which is logically impossible since it presupposes an infinitely lonely god who finds the possibility of relation only through creation, indicating his insufficiency and contingency. It is only in the Christian concept of God as a Trinity that one finds eternal relationality. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are eternally related to each other in love. Thus, finality of faith presupposes the finality of God as an eternal, infinite, all sufficient, unchanging, absolute, necessary, and relational being. If such were not the conception of God, then faith in a contingent, fluctuating, finite, self-contradictory, and unrelated god will and must not be final. If someone finalizes his faith in such a god that lacks such attributes, his faith is incoherent.

Faith is being assured and confident about the reality of things hoped for. Since this faith is distinctive and final, being based upon the absolute and unchanging nature of God, this assurance is also unshakeable and final. That is the reason why a man of faith is at peace with himself; he is not alarmed at the appearances of contradicting situations because he knows that the thing he is hoping

for is assured in the sight of God (Isa. 26:3). This gives him confidence in confessing and living out his faith. This drives away all fear and discouragement. Fear is a sign of unbelief; that is the reason why cowards cannot inherit the kingdom of God (Rev. 21:8). Those who are not bold enough to confess their faith do not have that faith. This is because the possession of faith also means the possession of assurance and confidence, since faith is the assurance of things hoped for. The assurance of hope is stronger than hope alone. For in it hope is combined with confidence. It gives greater strength for meaningful living. It is not like a man who embarks on a journey without a roadmap, but as a man who boards a train with its destination clearly signified on it. Thus, faith is being assured and confident about things hoped for. This assurance, however, is not passive but coterminous with accepting the reality of God and His truthful nature. Thus, whenever one believes God, he is also assured of the promises of God for his life. It is this assurance that gave Peter boldness to tell to the cripple, “Silver and gold have I none, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk” (Ac. 3:6, MKJV); and the man leapt, stood up, and walked because his healing was a fact which Peter knew beyond a doubt. Miracles only exist for those who can believe in them. If we can't be assured about the possibilities of God then we can be assured about nothing else. Therefore, the faith of God is distinctive and admitting no excuse.

FINAL EVIDENCE

The second part of this statement is parallel to the first. It modifies the first clause. Thus “substance” is “evidence” in the same manner that “things hoped for” are “unseen”. A significant truth of revelation here is that faith doesn't need further evidence for its existence than its presence itself. Since it is the final ground of the

CERTAINTY OF FAITH

FAITH IS FOUNDATIONAL

Faith is the basis for all spiritual knowledge and experiences.

FAITH IS SUBSTANTIAL

All spiritual things are substantially experienced by faith without reference to past, present, future.

FAITH IS ASSURANCE

The faith of God is the finality of assurance; for God is the Alpha and Omega of all reality, which includes the spiritual things that

He has already established.

things hoped for, it is also the evidence of the things hoped for. It is not based on anything else. It is the basis for everything that we know and experience. Attempts to base faith on rational or empirical proofs, i.e. on logic or experience, adds nothing to it. These may help to justify beliefs but cannot be the source of faith. One must not search for evidence for faith. Faith itself must be seen as the evidence for everything else. In fact, it is through the eyes of faith that meaning and the meaningfulness of divine truths is discerned. One proceeds from faith to the things and not from things to faith.

The Greek word for ‘evidence’ is *elegchos* (ελεγχος), which can either mean ‘proof’ or ‘conviction’. A conviction is an unshakeable belief in something without need of proof or evidence. This talks about the finality of this kind of faith. It doesn’t need evidence. The other meaning implies that having this faith itself is the evidence that the unseen things hoped for are true. That you can have faith for the things you hope for is the surest evidence of their reality and possibility.

There are, however, certain criteria to measure the authenticity of such faith since this could easily lead to superstition and false belief. First of all, the believer must possess a sound mind. This is necessary in order for faith not to be based on illusions or delusions; one knows that there are many in the lunatic asylums that have strong faith about many things which are not true. Secondly, faith must be open to reason;¹⁶ in other words, open to verification and falsification¹⁷ or, at least, justification. Faith is justified belief; by this is meant that the believer must always be able to give a justification for his faith as the Scripture says “Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you...” (1Pt. 1:15). This doesn’t mean that faith follows evidence; nor that evidence strengthens faith. On the other hand, it means that faith in itself is neither irrational nor without evidence, but is full of proofs though not based on proofs; therefore, an evangelist is never short of proofs – in fact, he might often be astounded by the proofs of his faith. Thirdly, this faith must be

¹⁶ Divine wisdom is ‘open to reason’ (Jas. 3:17, RSV).

¹⁷ Of course, faith as assurance is confident that it cannot be falsified- truth is crystal clear to it, but this doesn’t mean that it is not open to trial.

connected with righteousness and peace.¹⁸ This is so because the faith of God cannot contradict the character of God. By righteousness is meant not only that this faith is internally consistent (possesses integrity), but also that it is legally consistent (conforms to the righteous Law of God). At the same time, it engenders peace (good relationship with God and removal of fear and doubt). Fourthly, and most importantly, it must not contradict the written Word of God, i.e., the Scriptures, which reveal God. By this is meant that it must not contradict the real import of Scriptures – this doesn't apply to false interpretations of Scriptures; faith has nothing to do with them.

Now, to say that faith is the “evidence of things unseen” means that the invisible things are proven by faith. Evidence may be classified into two categories: rational evidence and empirical evidence. Rational evidence is expressible in the form of arguments or reasoning. Empirical evidence may be divided into two further groups: primary evidence and circumstantial evidence. Primary evidence is based on first-hand witness (e.g. the disciples saw the risen Lord). Circumstantial evidence is evidence not drawn from direct observation (e.g. the empty tomb). Faith is neither rational nor circumstantial evidence; it is primary evidence. In other words, faith is neither a set of arguments nor a set of data that needs interpretation and verification. On the other hand, the experience of faith itself is evidence of things unseen because it is the experience of a knowledge that is revelatory, illuminating, and convicting; it is the experience of the truth of God. To have the faith of God, therefore, means to possess the truth of God. Thus, though the things hoped for are invisible to us now, they are clearly known to faith.

Faith as evidence is also source of knowledge. Undeniably, faith is a voluntary act or else personal responsibility and even truth would be mythical. For if man doesn't know by exercise of his will then his knowledge is determined; but if determined then there is no possibility of verifying that knowledge to know whether it is true or false. Man would only know and believe what he is programmed to believe. But faith as voluntary act is the precursor to knowledge as

¹⁸ And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the service of righteousness shall be quietness and hope forever (Isa. 32:17, MKJV).

Jesus said, “If any man desires to do His will (God's pleasure), he will know (have the needed illumination to recognize, and can tell for himself) whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking from Myself and of My own accord and on My own authority” (Jn. 7:17, Amplified). Thus, the will-to-believe is the condition for the knowledge of truth. If anyone is unwilling to accept the truth, then all evidence is meaningless (perhaps detestable) to him. Therefore, faith as evidence (Sanskrit, *pramana* meaning also source of knowledge) is also source of knowledge.

One question that may arise in this connection regards the source of faith. Obviously, the source cannot be either reason or experience. For that would mean that faith is based on them and is not itself the final evidence. Further, any amount of reasoning cannot produce the absolute assurance that faith possesses. Thus, reason cannot be the basis of faith. In fact, as the French mathematician Blaise Pascal argued, to say that one believes on the basis of reason is to beg the question. For, one needs to first believe in reason itself before believing in its results. That is to say, reason itself is originally based on faith. Reason cannot be based on reason for that would evidently beg the question. The same also extends to experience. One can doubt the reality of everything about experience, as the French philosopher René Descartes showed.¹⁹ Consequently, faith itself cannot be based on experience. One chooses to believe in experience; one doesn't have faith out of experience in the ultimate sense. Thus, experience can only be the source of knowledge when it is based on faith. Faith can only be final when it is not ultimately based on reason and experience. All knowledge of this world, therefore, deriving from reason and experience is not final. There is always some element of doubt that is admissible. But the faith of God, as has already been seen, is fully assured and final. In fact, this faith of God is that which stabilizes knowledge by giving meaning to

¹⁹ Descartes proceeded on his methodology of doubt and doubted everything except the fact that he was the one who was doing the doubting. His famous conclusion “*Cogito ergo sum*”, “I think, therefore I am”, however, was disqualified by later philosophers and also Buddhist philosophy according to which the consciousness of a self or “I” might be just be an illusion created by the combination of several factors. Thus, everything could be doubted if experience were looked at as fundamental to knowledge.

both reason and experience. That is the reason why, disbelief in God, in its final form, leads to a sense of absurdity, hopelessness, skepticism, cynicism, and nihilism.

The source of faith then can be neither reason nor experience. What then is the source of faith? It is an encounter with the revelation of God as the Scripture says, “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). This doesn’t mean that one has faith as soon as one hears God’s voice; but, one exercises faith only when face to face with the revelation of God. In fact, one may choose to even reject the revelation. Faith is a choice, it is not automatically produced. When one encounters the revelation of God one has the choice of accepting it or rejecting it. The nature of both the encounter and choice is spiritual and not rational or physical. Therefore, the choice is also a moral one. Further, the truth revealed is spiritual and so physical events (e.g. miracles etc) cannot be regarded as final proof of it. The truth itself is its proof and is known only by someone who responds in faith. The one who rejects it remains unprofited by the encounter (cf. Heb. 4:2). The one who accepts it, however, is immediately ushered into the reality of God and, thus this faith becomes the substance and evidence of the unseen things one hopes for. As long as reason and experience are held on to, uncertainty and temporality holds the scepter; but faith unchains one from the infinite sequence of evidence and takes one beyond uncertainty to the substance, the ground, the confidence, and the evidence of the things of God.

The value of this faith is not measurable by human standards: it is only measured by God. The possession of this solid faith of God earned the elders a good report and testimony (Heb. 11:2). This was so because they possessed the thing they hoped for in the form of faith even though the fulfillment was scheduled only at the last day. They were undaunted by the present circumstances but were faithful to the end because of the assurance they had in God. Their faith was their evidence of the things still invisible to us, and by it they obtained a good testimony, God Himself testifying about their faithfulness. Their choice took them beyond uncertainty to obtain a good testimony from the Father.

In view of what we have seen this far, it is obvious that the source of all frustration, fear, anxiety, boredom, vexation, emptiness,

loneliness, and hopelessness is either the weakening of or the loss of faith. Of course, the world presents us with the crisis of faith: reasons for not believing in God. But the world has no substitute for the faith of God. To trust in the world or in man is to sink with the ship. Soon the loss of faith gives way to conscious or unconscious escapism. The means of escapism are not few and the worldliest are the most evil ones as well, hurting self and society. But they are also false ones along with the reality of their being temporal as well. They do not and cannot give eternal solace. It is the faith of God alone that gives true meaning, purpose, and reason to life.

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

1. One can only know and receive spiritual knowledge by faith.
2. In matters of faith, faith alone is evidence; although, it is not separable from reasonability.

CHAPTER TWO

Zero Reinterpreted

“Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God....” (Heb. 11:3)

One distinctive tenet of Christian faith is the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* or creation out of nothing. Contrary to many other cosmogonies, the Bible teaches us that God did not create this world out of some primordial substance; the universe is not eternal, but God created the world out of nothing. This is contrary to the natural principle that something cannot come out of nothing. Obviously, this doctrine, though unpalatable to reason, is acceptable to faith. This is not meant to say that faith contradicts natural philosophy, but that it transcends the natural and, therefore, can connect to the reality that gives significance to this universe.

It is not our purpose here to examine the many prevalent cosmologies of the world. However, it must be stated here that no cosmology that deals with the ultimate nature of reality can be absolutely based on reason or scientific inferences alone. This is so because neither the beginning nor the eternity of time is rationally conceivable. Similarly, neither the limits nor the infinitude of space is rationally conceivable. For instance, one Greek philosopher once asked his students what would happen if he stood at the end of the universe and threw a javelin; will it go anywhere? Obviously, an end was inconceivable. The German philosopher Immanuel Kant called it one of the antinomies of reason. Another antinomy relates to whether the universe has a cause or it is uncaused. Neither of the options is mentally conceivable. One may suggest theories regarding origins but can never rationally or scientifically prove beyond doubt that his theory is true. Theories “are always being changed to account for new observations,” as Stephen Hawking says,²⁰ and a complete unified theory that could explain the universe is still non-

²⁰ Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (London: Bantam Books, 1988), p. 178.

existent. Of course, many a philosopher proposed a quintessence of the universe, but his view still remains a theory. Further, no one can claim hold to such infinite knowledge that admits no deficiency and thus provides all the data necessary for a perfect deduction. But even if a beginning or non-beginning of the universe were 'proved', it will still be rationally and empirically unsatisfactory since the antinomy would still remain. Consequently, it is on the basis of faith alone that cosmogonies exist. Nevertheless, the truth or falsity of a claim can always be verified. For instance, one is very well sure that the myths that talk about the earth standing on a bull's horn or on the back of a giant tortoise are no longer tenable.

Creatio Ex Nihilo

The writer of Hebrews tells us here that it is by faith that "we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God". In other words, through faith we gain the understanding of how this world began, that "things which are seen were not made of things which do appear," i.e. the world was made out of nothing. However, someone else might by faith understand that the physical universe is the body of God. But then, how does one know which of the two is right? In fact, can anyone know which of the two is right or one can only hope or believe that one of them is right? The writer of Hebrews, obviously, is not concerned with this problem. To him what matters primarily is that by faith *we* understand that the universe was made out of nothing. However, on the basis of the fact that faith is the substance of things hoped for, one can evaluate the value of a particular faith by looking at the nature of hopes it entertains. In atheism, for instance, hope doesn't exist; in monism, hope is an illusion; in pantheism, hope is absurd (since good and evil ultimately become one); in polytheism, hope is uncertain (the gods are finite and might be overpowered by demons after all). Evidently, though tersely stated, none of the non-Biblical religious philosophies is seen to possess the worth of belief. For, if one needs to believe a cosmology, its anticipated hope must also be ultimately meaningful. If not, then the belief is not of any worth at all. It's neither worth living for nor worth dying for.

Obviously, the doctrine of creation out of nothing implies that the world, as it is, is basically composed of nothing since it was made

out of nothing. Without the creative power of the word of God, this world would have remained nothing; in other words, it would not even have existed. Theologians call all created reality as *contingent* since it owes its existence to something other than itself, i.e., to God. Thus, the world is ultimately nothing by itself and in itself. Therefore, idolatry and witchcraft are detested by God since, while the former holds that God can be represented in contingent forms, the latter holds that this universe itself contains the power to meet the gap between being and nothingness, both of which are false beliefs and expressions of false pride and presumption; thus being vain shows, they lead to nothing but eternal separation from God. Faith, however, takes one beyond the fringes of nothingness by reposing in the absolute possibilities of God.

INFINITE POSSIBILITIES

The strong optimism of the faith of God is that it has the infinite power of God on its side and is, therefore, able to see infinite possibilities where natural eyes fail to see even a glimpse of hope. Only infinity spans the difference between being and nothingness. To put it the other way, the difference between zero (0) and one (1) is infinite. Therefore, it takes infinite power to bring out something out of nothing. Obviously, the faith that can understand and perceive the world as created out of this zero-state (not some singularity), is the faith of the most immense kind. In fact, it is the faith that can do anything because for it anything is possible.²¹ If the God I believe in is able to produce the world out of absolute nothing then He is able to do anything for me. Therefore, I can never be a miserable man as long as I believe in God. It is this faith that gave Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego the boldness to refuse the worship of King Nebuchadnezzar's image, though threatened with death. They told the king,

O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your

²¹ This doesn't mean, however, that something illogical like a square-circle or the creation of a necessary being (God) is possible. Illogical or self-contradictory concepts can never have any reality.

hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up. (Dan. 3:16 – 18, NIV).

The faith of these three men was final: whether God saved them or didn't save them from the burning furnace, they were going to trust Him alone because they knew their God. There is nothing utilitarian about this faith. It's not based on some selfish desire of comfort or security but is final in itself as they said "we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter." It is the faith that defies the world and glorifies God.

The infinite power of God, which is also inexhaustible, is unlike the *contingent* physical force inherent in this universe. Even magic can't compare with it. Though it is believed by some that magical powers exist and that magicians can produce objects out of thin air, the magicians themselves deny it. As Gaudapada²² said "dream and magic are seen to be unreal."²³ Only God who possesses infinite power can bring things out of nothing. In fact, only God can possess infinite power since He alone is a *necessary* being²⁴ and above all exhaustibility, definitions, and determinations of contingency. Therefore, nobody who clings on to some power of this physical world (be it *mana*, *chi*, or *sakti*) can possess the infinite power akin to God since whatever power he possesses is conditioned by contingency and so will always remain finite and thus infinitely incapable of *creatio ex nihilo*. Thus, only the eternal God who transcends this universe can create things out of nothing by His infinite power. Obviously, then the faith of God inevitably transcends the rigors and conditions of this *contingent* world. Therefore, events, circumstances, and appearances of the world do

²² Gaudapada was the teacher of Sankaracharya (A.D.788-820), a Hindu philosopher who established the school of Advaita Vedanta.

²³ *Mandukya Upanisad with the Karika of Gaudapada and the Commentary of Sankaracarya*, trans. Swami Gambhirananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1995), II.31, p. 84.

²⁴ A necessary being is one whose existence cannot be denied since the fact of existence is proof that being must be eternal; but since contingent being (the universe) cannot be eternal it must be contingent on some necessary being that is free of all contingency and infinite in being and power. This necessary being is God. To deny Him means to deny existence itself, which is self-contradictory.

not matter to the one who has the faith of God. He is not alarmed by them because his faith is above them all. It is transcendental.

The Concreteness of Faith

But it is not abstract. The concreteness of faith is already evident in its being called the substance of things hoped for. Further, this power is not something undemonstrated now. This world itself is an example of God's immense power as the Word says, "I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are upon the ground, by my great power and by my outstretched arm" (Jer. 27:5). To the early Christians as to many believers today, the infinite power of God is not an abstract hope but a concrete reality. The resurrection of Christ, for instance, witnessed by over 500 people (1Cor. 15:4-9) was evidence of this great power of God which Paul describes as "the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:19-20). In fact, the Bible says that it is this power that is also active in us today: "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Eph. 3:20-21). It is also the hope of all believers that as God raised Jesus Christ from the dead by His great power, so will He also raise us up at the last day as the Scripture says "God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power" (1Cor. 6:14; cf. Phil. 3:10).

This infinite and inexhaustible divine power working in us, i.e. actively and dynamically present within us, produces the signs, wonders, and miracles that we see today and that are inexplicable on natural terms (cf. Heb. 2:3-4; Rom. 15:18-19). This power is not produced in us (as some think of the term *dynamis*); it is actively present in us. It is only through faith that one can bring into concretion the possibilities of this divine power. However, one must understand that this is not some mystical, occultic, or magical power that can be controlled by us. This is God's power that is active in us only because God is active within us (cf. Phil. 2:13). And He works according to His sovereign good will and purpose. It is only when

faith attunes with God's will expressed in His word that miracles take place.

This power cannot be counterfeited. The Egyptian magicians tried to counterfeit Moses' miracles but could not stand before him for long. At last, they conceded saying "This is the finger of God" (Ex. 8:19). The devil cannot counterfeit it, since he himself is contingent. Therefore, the Scripture says that "the devils also believe, and tremble" (Jas. 2:19). The boldness of a man of faith, consequently, is quite different from the boldness of worldly men and even demons. Worldly confidence is false because the world is nothing in itself and by itself. One who puts confidence in the world or its things is like a man clinging to a falling tree. The man of faith knows that the world is a finite scheme of things that will soon pass away, but he who follows God's will abides forever (1Jn. 2:17). All the hopes and dreams cherished by worldly men will perish with the world on the last day of Judgment when unbelievers will be confined to infinite contingency and nothingness (not of non-being but of existence; i.e. where existential frustration and emptiness would be hellishly painful, they being separated from the life, power, and goodness of God).

To believers the faith of God presents great optimism, not necessarily this-worldly, but of God. As this chapter unravels, the difference between this-worldly optimism and divine vision will be clearly seen. Jesus Himself when answering Pilate said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place" (Jn. 18:32, NIV). The fact that believers go through trials and suffering and that there are martyrs for the faith is evidence that Biblical optimism is not this-worldly, ultimately. This, however, doesn't mean that God has no power over this world. God does deliver His people from troubles but this deliverance is not that final kind of deliverance which a believer is optimistic about. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, but then Lazarus died again. Yet, since the believers hope is not limited only to death, it is far superior to the hopes of this world, as Paul says "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (1Cor. 15:19). This optimism, therefore, is far greater than what the world can imagine.

Indubitably, also then faith is not the opium of the masses as the Socialist thinker, Karl Marx, thought. It is not something that dulls rational thinking in hope of some future heaven, thus leaving the present to its fate. The Bible is very clear about this that God is truly at work in us even now. The experience of God is not a strange phenomenon to believers. They are in the fellowship of light. Answered prayers, miraculous deliverances, supernatural blessings and the turning of people to God are evidence of the present reality of divine power working in us. Moreover, it is a fact of faith that it is God working in world history to bring about the completion of His will. This is indicated by what we'll next see as God's framing the worlds by His word.

WORLDS IN THE MAKING

The Greek word *aion* (ἀιών), translated here as “worlds”, can mean “an age”, “the universe”, or “eternity”. It basically carries the concept of being in time. This takes us further from looking at the world only at its beginning to looking at the world in the whole of time (past, present, and future). To put it differently, we are looking at this contingent world taking shape in time. Obviously, the expression “the worlds were framed by the word of God” doesn't simply mean that time was framed but that something was framed in time, that something spatio-temporal took a particular shape by the power of the word of God; thus, were the ages framed or fitted together.²⁵

Evidently, then, this is not limited to just the creation of the world but extends to also the shaping of history by the providence of God. This is also indicated by the usage of the word *rhema* (ρῆμα) for “word”, meaning “spoken word” or “command” in specific situations. In other words, faith sees history as only meaningful in connection with the will of God. In light of what this chapter is going to speak about, viz. the heroes of faith, it may be seen how history was shaped when different individuals at different moments in time responded to the voice of God. God could only shape the ages because people responded to Him in faith. This doesn't mean

²⁵ That is the import of the Greek word *katartizo* (καταρτίζω) used here for ‘framed’. It was often used in relation to architectural construction.

that He is not free to do as He wills, but that when people responded to Him in faith, they became part of His grand design and thus became part of sacred history. Apart from God, they would have been reduced to chaotic nothingness. But faith in God took them beyond their limitations and turned their chaotically oriented world into divinely structured histories. By submitting to the Great Architect, they ensured the beautifying of their lives.

The framing of ages was by the specific word of God “so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.” *Creatio ex nihilo* also applies here to the shaping of ages in the progression of time. The faith-heroes brought things into existence out of nothing by their acts of faith in the revelation of God. The impossible was made possible by the faith of God. For instance, as will be seen in Abraham’s case, the birth of Isaac was the result of faith in the promise of God. This child of Abraham, in accordance to the promise, later became a nation and a blessing to many nations. Similarly, Moses triumphed over his own inabilities by his faith in God and thus was able to lead the Israelites to the borders of the Promised Land. The things that we see now in present history were not made of things which do appear. That is to say, they were not products of visible natural processes or human talents. They are results of God’s interventions in history on behalf of those who trusted in His nature, power, and purposes and were obedient to His will.

The Bible makes it very clear that it is God who controls the world. It is He who, for instance, “rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He will” (Dan. 4:25, MKJV). But someone would ask, if this is true then why does God seem to be so silent while crime, wars, and violence prevail everywhere? This question is natural to the heart that has lost its touch with the heart of God. One can only doubt God when one’s heart is overruled by the visible realities of this world and has lost sight of the “things hoped for”. Indubitably, the question has been asked several times by servants of God themselves. But the answer has always come in being assured of the final end of all this. For instance, observe what Asaph says in Psalm 73:

I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills. Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence. From their callous hearts comes iniquity; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits. They scoff, and speak with malice; in their arrogance they threaten oppression.... They say, "How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?" This is what the wicked are like – always carefree, they increase in wealth.... When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.... Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you. But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds (Ps. 73:3-12, 17, 27-28, NIV).

Now, this reasoning will be unacceptable to the unbelieving mind. But to the man of faith, this is not reasoning: this is fact. Further, God can only judge the world for the crimes it has committed. All tribunals have the same purpose: to judge criminals for their crimes and not for their potentiality for crimes. And man is only free to do as he likes in this framework of the kingdom of man. Earthly judgment (at the most capital punishment) is given by earthly tribunals (Rom. 13:4), by the act's consequences (Prov. 18:7; 11:19), and sometimes by God (Jer. 14:12). The final judgment, however, will be unlike earthly judgment: the punishment is eternal damnation (Mt. 25:46; Mk. 3:29). But the question will be asked, "Why doesn't God prevent crimes if He is a just ruler?" The answer is that this is not God's prerogative in the kingdom of men. Man is responsible for it because man started it when he chose to disobey God and was cast out of God's garden. The casting out of the garden to a world of thorns and thistles represented God's abandoning of man to his discretion. It is only His mercy that grants man the opportunity to choose God and become part of the redemption plan which He has drawn in order to finalize the purpose of creation. At present, however, God is only related to the governance of this world as far as His purpose of His kingdom is concerned. That is what is evident from Jesus' statement that "My kingdom is not of this world." God intervenes in human history in accordance to His

final purpose. It is only in this way that He frames the ages. Thus, the phrase “the fullness of the time” in Galatians 4:4 refers to a point in the divine blue-print of time when Christ was ordained to be born. Despite the fact that the world continued to see several evils in the course of time, the time-table of God was not affected since God was in perfect control of His processes. Similarly, God is in perfect control of this present world and His sacred history is unaffected by the evil of men.²⁶ However, anyone who responds to God in faith becomes part of this history and heir of the blessings of His kingdom. And, since the believer is a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, he can claim heaven’s protection and blessings over his life, though the final and complete manifestation of this is still awaited (cf. Phil. 3:20; 4:19; Heb. 1:14; Ps. 34:7; Rev. 11:15). Consequently, anyone who enters the world of God’s history becomes His partner in the establishment of God’s kingdom and thus affects the way this world runs. To quote one example, the conversion of the African tribes did put an end to demonism and cannibalism there and opened them up to the blessings of God. African history since then has been different. This doesn’t mean that Africa is totally saved. But this definitely means that it is not the same anymore. Its history has been shaped by the word of God and is continually being shaped as men of faith respond to God’s call.

FAITH BEYOND PHENOMENA

The word for “things that do appear” is *phainomenon* (φαίνομενον) which is in the middle voice and is used in this form only once in the New Testament. It comes from the word *phaino* which means “to shine”, “to show”, and “to appear”. The English word derived from this Greek word is “phenomenon” meaning “thing that appears”. A literal rendering of the Greek text would be: “Not out of things that appear (*phainomenon*) were the things that are seen (*blepomena*)

²⁶ A study of Daniel’s prophecy in Daniel 9:24-27 shows the perfection of divine timing. The prophecy was that Christ will be crucified 69 weeks (i.e. 483 years; each week meaning 7 years) from the issuing of the decree to build Jerusalem. The decree was issued in 445 B.C. by Cyrus. Exactly 483 years later, according to the Jewish lunar calendar, Jesus was crucified in A.D. 32. Remember that the Jewish calendar has 360 days in a year and no leap years.

made.”²⁷ To the Greek mind, *phainomenon* simply was an appearance or resemblance and not necessarily the actual image of the thing.²⁸ For instance, a spoon standing in a glass half-filled with water appears to be bent though not really bent. Perhaps, in using the word *phainomenon* here the writer of Hebrews also wishes to say that faith doesn’t look at the things that are now apparent to us as the real basis of this visible world. As appearance cannot be the final basis of knowledge, so can it not be the final object of faith. In other words, faith is not controlled by “things that do appear” or phenomenon; on the contrary, it is controlled by the word of God since the worlds were framed by it and not made by the “things that do appear”. In fact, they have appeared out of nothing only because God commanded them to be.

The apparent can often confound faith. For instance, as Peter began walking on water by faith in Christ’s word, his eyes turned to the winds which appeared to him to be strong (or stronger?) and his heart lost confidence and began to fear. Consequently, he began to sink (Mt. 14:30). Obviously, what was apparent to him was in actuality false; not false in the sense that it didn’t exist but false in the sense of his perception of it. Things don’t appear as they show themselves to be; on the contrary, they appear to us as we take their appearances to be. It is we who impose our meanings on the things around us. It is our intentionality that determines our conception of things. The problem of faith is not the world around it but the way one sees and thus makes it appear to be to oneself. Truth can never create doubt or fear; it can only liberate (Jn. 8:32). Where the meaning imposed is false, the belief is also false.

The modern world presents before faith more complications to deal with. While in the pre-technological era it was mythical stories that presented a distorted picture of reality, in modern times it is the bombardment of pictures and virtual reality through television and cinema that distorts reality and presents a false *phainomena*. The images may be too convincing, yet they drive one away from reality; in fact, they influence the mind to look at things in a confusing

²⁷ τὸ μὴ ἐκ φανομένων τὰ βλεπόμενα γεγονέατι.

²⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 25.

manner; for instance, that God is not in control, that smoking is very fashionable, that vengeance is right, that adultery is fun, and thousands of such lies. Thus, with myriads of false objects before the mind, faith can lose sight of reality if it doesn't stand aright and hold on to the truth unwaveringly. The pictures may be destructive or seductive. Bertrand Russell once said that "Japanese novelists never consider that they have achieved a success unless large numbers of real people commit suicide for love of the imaginary heroine."²⁹ That is the power of imagination. It is not surprising then that the devil showed Jesus the glory of the world and proposed to give it to Him if He would only fall and worship him. He somehow conceived that the way things were presented or made to appear could destroy the faith of even the Son of God. Of course, by showing things in the wrong light he tries to first create doubt and then destroy faith. For once the carnal mind takes hold of imagination, faith will inevitably recede. Hadn't David known and experienced the power of God and Gehazi seen Elisha raising up the dead? But both of them fell into sin when their faith was broken on the altar of appearances (cf. 2 Sam. 11; 2Kgs. 5:20-27).

The vision of faith transcends the fake realities of this world. Natural interpretations of the world are never the object of faith. This is why the conflict of faith can sometimes be a tensed one when the mind is wavering between what the natural mind perceives to be and what the Word of God declares to be. The natural mind cannot receive the things of God because they are beyond its understanding. In fact, they might even appear to be absurd to it (1Cor. 2:14). For instance, when Jesus told the mourners at Jairus' house that the girl was not dead but asleep, all of them jeered at Him (Lk. 8:52, 53). But He put them all out, took the girl by her hand and called her saying "Little girl, arise!" And she immediately arose. There was no denying the fact that the girl was dead. But the vision of faith does not terminate with natural facts. It also does not entertain the

²⁹ F. C. Copleston and Bertrand Russell, "A Debate on the Argument from Religious Experience", from *Why I Am Not a Christian* by Bertrand Russell, as printed in *Introduction to Philosophy* by Louis P. Pojman (ed.) (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1991), p. 198.

negativity of those that cannot glorify God because of their lack of faith: that is the reason why He put them all out. The natural fact was that she was dead. The spiritual truth was that she was asleep; because faith is the substance of things hoped for and sleeping anticipates waking. Faith could see beyond the natural appearances of things. What didn't appear to be here was that she was alive. What faith could see here was that she was alive, though sleeping. The word that Jesus spoke brought this faith into visible reality. Thus, "not out of things that appear was this thing that was seen made."

To conclude, one must remember that faith is never self-induced imagination. On the other hand, it is given by God in the sense that the vision of faith is the revealed truth of God. To walk after the imagination of one's heart is evil (Gen. 6:5). Similarly, to walk against the truth of God is also sin (Rom. 1:18). For instance, to say that one cannot be justified by faith in the blood of Jesus is to commit the sin of unbelief and transgress against the righteousness and truth of God. It is not what one is able to imagine or conceive of that is vital to faith. The most important thing is how far one can believe in the truth declared by His Word. True faith cannot be less than final since to believe God is to believe in His infinite power and possibilities. Thus, nothing is impossible for those who can believe in God.

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

1. The God who created this world out of nothing has infinite power to work on our behalf.
2. Faith doesn't look at appearances; it walks according to divine revelation.

CHAPTER THREE

Effacing Evanescence

“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain... and by it he being dead yet speaketh”
(Heb. 11:4)

The names that Adam and Eve gave their children reveal something of what they thought about life. When their first son was born, they named him Cain (*qayin*), meaning “possession”, as Eve said “I have gotten a man from the **Lord**” (Gen. 4:1). When the second son was born they named him Abel (*hebel*), which means “vapor” or “breath”. Probably, by this time they had begun to see the evanescence of life and the reality of death that consumed man as a vapor.

The word *hebel*, in fact, is the motif of Ecclesiastes *Hebel* (vanity) of *hebelim* (vanities), says the preacher, all is *hebel* (vanity). The word signifies temporality, transitoriness, ephemerality, impermanence, meaninglessness, effervescence, and vanity. By naming their son as Abel, Adam and Eve indicated their perspective of man as a perishing creature. The view is not unfounded. It was their sin that brought this calamity on man. “Dust thou art” God had said “and unto dust thou shalt return” (Gen. 3:19). Ever since then callous death has held sway over kings and paupers alike, having sympathy on none. It stands as a great taskmaster exacting of men all toil and labor to stall its fury until it suddenly strikes taking its toll. The vanishing strength of a hero, the fading beauty of a queen; the ebbing tide of desire and the melting texture of pride soon screech to halt at grave. With such pessimistic identity for a name, could Abel survive the plot of life? Yet, death was crueler to him. His elder brother Cain killed Abel out of jealousy and hatred. However, before this tragic end Abel had already obtained witness, says the Word, “that he was righteous” (Heb. 11:4). This was the testimony of no man but of God, and that was regarding his offering and his gifts to God, by which though being dead he yet speaks.

One of the greatest privileges that a believer has is the opportunity to give to the Lord. Abel’s offering was both sacrifice

(*thusia*, θυσία) and gifts (*doron*, δῶρον). The phrase “gifts and sacrifices” is used three times in the book of Hebrews, each time in connection with the priestly offerings in the temple (cf. Heb. 5:1; 8:3,4; 9:9). For instance, Hebrews 5:1 tells us that “every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.” The phrase “both gifts and sacrifices for sins” indicates that the two are not the same but different from each other. “Sacrifices for sins” refers to the blood sacrifices offered for the remission of sins, whereas “gifts” refers to free-will offerings. However, it is not evident that this distinction really existed in the pre-Mosaic age. According to Moses’ Law, sacrifice for sins was mandatory while gifts were voluntary. However, it seems that since such a law had not yet been established, the sacrifice that Abel brought was voluntary and, as such, also his gift, it being a voluntary act of faith: if this is true then Abel’s sacrifice of the fattest of the firstlings (the best of the best, cf. Gen. 4:4) combined the essence of worship and service in one.

The shedding of blood, in sacrifice, was considered to be necessary for the remission of sins (Heb. 9:22). The sacrifice was indispensable, since the gifts meant nothing unless reconciliation with God was first effected. To us in the New Testament, there is no more need for sacrifice of animals since Jesus Christ offered Himself once for all as the sacrifice for our sins (Heb. 9:28; 10:14). However, though imperfect in effectuality (that’s why they had to be offered again and again) animal sacrifice was indispensable to the spirituality of the Old Testament. Its significance consisted in its function as a type and foreshadowing of the eternal sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Heb. 10:1-14). Abel’s offering of a blood sacrifice revealed his acknowledgement of his sin and his need for redemption. It is evident to us now that what is a past event for us now (viz. the sacrifice of Christ) was to the Old Testament saints a thing hoped for and something yet unseen. It was by faith that the sacrifice of Christ became a reality to them through the animal sacrifice and they were declared righteous because they hoped for and experienced it beforehand by faith. Thus, Abel received the testimony of being righteous by faith in not his own righteousness but in the righteousness of God. This recognition before God is far superior to this-worldly reputation and honor. Abel’s life may have seemed

short, vain, and extinguished in men's eyes; but in the sight of God he bears the testimony of a worth that is eternal. He was justified and declared as righteous in the sight of God. However, the value of Abel is not contained in the category of his sacrifice but in the commitment of his heart to God. In fact, the tearing apart of an animal in sacrifice meant nothing if the heart lay not broken already on the altar of God in total surrender.

WORTH IN WORSHIP

It was not that Abel alone brought his offering before God; Cain too brought his own. However, God respected Abel's offering but not Cain's (Gen. 4:4, 5). It is obvious, that bringing an offering to the Lord is more than a physical act; it is a spiritual act and the Bible makes it very clear that a broken and a contrite heart is far valuable before the Lord than a herd of animal sacrifices or tons of grain offerings (Ps. 51:17). Evidently, since Abel's sacrifice was not made mandatory by some law, it was his voluntary offering and thus superseded the mere rigors of religious ritualism or legalism. It was his worship of God in spirit and in truth.

Worth of Giving

The worth of a gift is measured not by the content of the gift but by the intent of the giver's heart. One may remember the story of the poor widow who dropped into the treasury of the temple only two small copper coins, while the rich walked by dropping bags of money into it. Jesus looked at all this and said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on" (Mk. 12:43-44). That talks more than words can say about this poor widow's faith in and commitment to God. It's very easy to share a piece of bread with somebody when one has two. But what if he has only one? Added to this is the question of whether the temple treasury is really in need of those last two coins of this poor widow. She could have argued, as many believers today argue, that the temple is already very rich and financed by stout pockets; therefore, she need not part with the last of her coins. Thirdly, legally the widow was the one that needed to be supported by gifts (Dt. 14:29; 16:11; 24:19, 20), and she was not

under any legal compulsion to cast her two mites. But she did, not because she was forced to but because she wanted to; not because God or the temple needed it, but because she needed to; and she cast her everything into God's treasury – all she had to live on. That is the faith that honors God and attaches priceless worth to worship.

That is the same reason why the Scriptures say about Abel that by faith he “offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain”. It is already evident that Abel brought the “firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof” while Cain only brought “of the fruit of the ground an offering” (Gen. 4:3, 4). It is very clear from this that Cain was neither concerned about the distinctness of God's altar nor the value of the offering. He just brought something in the way of a vacant ritual. And that is how God treated his ritual. His grief over his being rejected was, therefore, unexpected. And so God said to him, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it” (Gen. 4:6, 7, NIV). But Cain was no longer for the listening anymore. He turned to his brother, took him to the field and slew him there. By now his hypocrisy had revealed its cruelty. Therefore, the Word says that Cain murdered his brother because “his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous” (1Jn. 3:12). But why were his brother's works righteous and his evil?

Evil and Good

The murder itself was evil, but preceding it was the evil of Cain's heart. But, I think we should define the word “evil” before judging Cain. As a Biblical way of answering it, let's draw a primary definition of it as “something that is evil in the sight of God”. That is

3 KINDS OF GIVING

RITUALISTIC

Giving just for the sake
of giving

COMPULSIVE

Giving unwillingly

CHEERFUL

Giving from the heart:
willingly, generously,
lovingly, and
meaningfully.

not to say that the definition of evil³⁰ is not rationally possible; for, then this would beg the question since it will be necessary again to explain why something is evil in God's sight. But to be evil in God's sight and to be rationally evil are the one and the same thing for reasons that'll be explained now.

God is perfect being because He has no deficiencies, for if He had any He would not be infinite and, therefore, not God. Therefore, to avoid self-contradiction and self-destruction of the concept it is necessary to assert that God is perfect being and lacks nothing. To lack nothing means to lack no good thing since lacking anything good would amount to deficiency and, consequently, imperfection. Therefore, God lacks no good thing. In other words, He is the embodiment of infinite goodness. Therefore, evil is that which falls short of His perfection. In other words, the evil that is seen as abrogating some virtue of reason is in fact evil that opposes the character of God. Therefore, evil is also that which is evil in God's sight and what He calls as evil since He is the perfection of wisdom and judgment. Secondly, God is the active source of all this-worldly reality. He created it and sustains it. Therefore, there is nothing in this world that can go against Him and retain an independently justifiable standing. Consequently, all rational definitions of ultimate value conform to the source, God. Thirdly, God is the finality of the best and the one above whom nothing else can be conceived of. In other words, He is the finality of rationality. This doesn't mean that He is limited by reason if reason be truly limited – I mean reason in itself and not the limited reasoning capacity of man; in fact, Jesus is called the *Logos* of God, meaning reason, intelligence, and word. And since God is the final point of reason, therefore, the rational definition of anything cannot contradict God's definition of it. In fact, God's definition can transcend the rational definition, but the rational can never disqualify the divine definition. Therefore, evil is what is evil in God's sight.

Now, evil is seen as the opposite of righteousness; thus, to fall short of righteousness is to do evil. But the Bible makes it very clear

³⁰ We are here dealing with moral evil that is concerned with deliberate human actions. Other forms of evil such as psychological suffering, diseases, and natural adversities (earthquakes, floods, etc) are not our concern here.

that righteousness has never and can never be the product of human works but is the work of faith as is said “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous” (Heb. 11:4). Clearly then, Cain’s works were evil because they were not according to faith and Abel’s were righteous because they were done by faith. The faith of God decided the acceptability or unacceptability of any action before God. But why must faith be the criteria for righteousness?

Righteousness by Faith

This is so because, firstly, faith is the fundamental condition and voluntary determinant of all moral action, and, secondly, faith is that which connects one to the righteous works of God. Moral actions are moral only in so far as they are exercises of morally intelligent and volitional beings. That is why neither animals nor lunatics can be incriminated. Morality is the intelligent acceptance of God’s definition of good and evil. The reason for such acceptance has been explained earlier. This intelligent acceptance constitutes faith in God. Immorality is the intelligent rejection of God’s definition of good and evil. This intelligent rejection constitutes unbelief in God, which is also

rebellion. The sin of Adam and Eve was their choice to renounce their faith in what God defined to be good and evil, thus renouncing their faith in God. Eve believed the lie of the serpent and the power of the tree (symbol of nature; cf. Rom. 1:18-23). Adam followed Eve and thus the whole mankind was condemned because the consequence of their false faith was naturally irreversible. Therefore, they were cast out of the Garden of God. All this was due to their unbelief in and rebellion against the divine prescription. Thus, it is on the basis of faith alone that moral actions become possible.

FAITH & RIGHTEOUSNESS

ACTIVE GROUND

Faith is the assent of the heart with the truth of God and, therefore the intellectual and volitional basis of the right.

DYNAMIC ACTION

The act of faith is manifest in dynamic acting out of righteousness.

DYNAMIC RELATION

Faith connects the believer to the truth of God; thus, one participates in the righteous works of God by linking with Him by faith-assent, faith-trust, faith-reliance, faith-hope, and faith-action.

Consequently, if one has faith in God his faith will inevitably manifest through his actions (Jas. 2:17, 18). Therefore, faith is the fundamental condition and voluntary determinant of all moral action. Further, faith connects one to the eternal righteousness of God. If I have complete faith in the present government, for instance, I will definitely believe that whatever it does is right; thus, I'm connected to its 'righteousness'. Faith in this-worldly things need not be complete since nothing here is perfect and final; however, as seen earlier, the faith of God admits no shadow of doubt and so it is in perfect conformity to the will of God; consequently, it is connected to the righteousness of God and all God's works intended to fulfill the righteousness of God (which includes our salvation plan through Jesus Christ). Therefore, it is by faith that one is declared to be righteous.

Faith as Worship

Faith gives God the worth that is truly His because it believes who God is as He reveals Himself to be. Therefore, the faith of God is the worship of God. When the devil came to Jesus and told Him that if He fell down and worshipped him, he would give Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, Jesus rebuked him saying, "Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Mt. 4:10). The devil had asked for a divine impossibility. It reveals his frustration in running out of tactics to deceive or allure our Lord. Jesus not only knew the truth; He is the truth of God, the finality of divine revelation. Therefore, He can't be deceived. However, the devil might have thought that he could confuse the Lord by turning His eyes to the visible appearances of this-worldly reality. Thus, he wished that the phenomena would somehow thwart His faith. But the Lord rebuked him saying, "Go away, Satan: for it is written...." He countered the devil with the Word of faith and reminded him of the divine command "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." The Greek word for "worship" used here is *proskuneo*, which literally meant to prostrate oneself in homage or reverence. The word for "serve" is *latreuo* and refers to the kind of service that is given in the temple. Observe the connection between worship and service here as always: only a worshipping heart can truly serve the

Lord. In other words, sacrifices and offerings that do not come from a worshipping heart do not matter at all. The devil was asking the Lord to fall (obviously, from the truth) and prostrate before him in subservience to him. This involved giving the devil the worth that only belonged to God, which constituted false worship. Any worship that is not rightly directed to God is false. That is the reason why idolatry is also false since it falsely represents the God of creation and doesn't glorify God as God, but worships and serves the creature more than the Creator (Rom. 1:21, 25). But true worship gives God the worth that truly belongs to Him.³¹ It is for this reason that Jesus told His disciples that "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent" (Jn. 6:29). In other words, it is in believing on and accepting the One sent by God that one truly serves Him. Therefore, the faith of God is the true worship of God and service of Him.

Now, true worship not only glorifies God but also gives the worshipper the true honor that comes from God as the Lord said "for them that honor me I will honor, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed" (1Sam. 2:30). Jesus said to the Jews "How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?" (Jn. 5:44). Their lack of faith deprived them of the worth and dignity that comes only from God. The honor of this world, however, is as evanescent as the world itself as the Word says "all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth forever" (1Pt. 1:24, 25). Therefore, it is in submission to the truth of God by faith alone that one finds true dignity and worth.

God accepted Abel's offering because Abel gave by faith. The Bible says that God had respect unto Abel and to his offering (Gen. 4:4). It was not just the offering that was respected but Abel himself was first accepted because of his absolute faith in God. The Hebrew word for "respect" is *sha'ah* and means "to gaze and look at", which implies "to have respect for and consider something worth looking at." Thus, God considered with respect Abel's sacrifice but He didn't even look at Cain's offering. Cain's offering was as if directed

³¹ It is said that the original form of the word *worship* was *worth-ship*.

to nobody. God didn't consider it worth any attention. This was so because only faith attracts the attention of God; and it is faith alone that gives worth to both the gift and the giver, because it is through faith alone that one connects himself to the realities of God. Thus, Abel conquered the evanescent worth of this world by putting his faith in God and giving himself in worship and service to Him; thereby, obtaining a testimony that still speaks though he is dead. He obtained that eternal worth and honor that comes from God alone.

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

1. Only one who approaches God with can appreciate His true worth in worship.
2. Through faith in God one comes to a right standing with Him – which is, righteousness.

CHAPTER FOUR

Climbing the Clouds

“By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death” (Heb. 11:5).

The seventh from Adam, Enoch was also a prophet. In fact, he was the first man who ever prophesied about the second coming of Jesus Christ (Jude 14, 15). He was also the first man in Scripture who never saw death: he was taken away to heaven alive. The writer of Hebrews tells us that he was translated³² (i.e. to heaven) so that he should not see death; which also implies that death has no power in heaven where God rules. The process of decay and ageing inherent in the spatio-temporal and entropic (decreasing energy) world is absent in the transcendental and spiritual world of heaven. It was known to the contemporaries of Enoch that he walked with God (use to have a close fellowship with God) and that God took him; not just as a matter of conjecture but as a fact, which reveals that he bore a very strong witness of piety and the grace of God during his days on earth. The reason why God took him and not the other saints is not a matter of debate opened to us by God. Remember that “the secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Dt. 29:29). However, Augustine saw a foreshadowing significance in Enoch’s translation with reference to his being the seventh from Adam and his being called Enoch (meaning “dedication”, i.e. to God), who prefigured the dedication of the heavenly city in contrast to Cain’s son Enoch who represented the earthly city dedicated to the world. In his own words, his opinion is argued as follows:

³² The Greek word *metatithemi* (μετατίθημι) is the one used by the LXX in Gen. 5:4 for “took away” where it says, “And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.”

For that line also of which Seth is the father has the name “Dedication” in the seventh generation from Adam, counting Adam. For the seventh from him is Enoch, that is, Dedication. But this is that man who was translated because he pleased God, and who held in the order of the generations a remarkable place, being the seventh from Adam, a number signalized by the consecration of the Sabbath. But, counting from the diverging point of the two lines, or from Seth, he was the sixth. Now it was on the sixth day God made man, and consummated His works. But the translation of Enoch prefigured our deferred dedication; for though it is indeed already accomplished in Christ our Head, who so rose again that He shall die no more, and who was Himself also translated, yet there remains another dedication of the whole house, of which Christ Himself is the foundation, and this dedication is deferred till the end, when all shall rise again to die no more. And whether it is the house of God, or the temple of God, or the city of God, that is said to be dedicated, it is all the same....³³

Obviously, Augustine regards Enoch’s translation as akin to the translation of saints on the Last Day, which means that he will never die again in accordance to the Word in Hebrews 11:5. However, some have opined that he will have to return to die a mortal’s death as appointed for all men (cf. Heb. 9:27), and this would be during the Great Tribulation (cf. Rev. 11:2-11). For instance, the church father Tertullian said that the death of Enoch and Elijah was postponed till the time comes that by their blood they may extinguish Anti-Christ.³⁴ Others do not think that this needs to be so. In fact, they say, Moses and Elijah would best fit the interpretation of the two witnesses in Revelation 11 than Enoch and one of them. Moses and Elijah represented the Law and the Prophets and the miracles of Revelation 11 are similar to those done by them during their ministry. They will “represent the Jewish Christian community

³³ Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Modern Library, 1950), p. 505.

³⁴ Tertullian, *A Treatise on the Soul*, Eds. Rev. Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. III. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), pp. 227-228. Also see Hippolytus, *The Extant Works and Fragments of Hippolytus*, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. V. (1990), p. 213 and *The History of Joseph the Carpenter*, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. VIII (1995), p. 394.

at the end of history.”³⁵ But, since Moses’ death is already mentioned in the Bible, some have thought that Enoch would better fit the picture with Elijah than Moses would. The complications of such interpretation need not be dealt here since we are presently concerned with Hebrews 11 and not Revelation 11. However, there seems to be good reasons for also saying that Enoch need not come back to the earth to die a mortal’s death after all since the word ‘translated’ may also mean that the change was not just a matter of place but also the bodily salvation or transformation of Enoch, in which case he, having donned immortality, cannot die again as Revelation 11 predicts; in which case, further, one of the witness of Revelation 11 cannot be Enoch or even Elijah.

Translation before the Final Day

There are strong reasons to suppose that Enoch’s translation also meant his transformation, though this doesn’t prove that it might have happened that way. It might be that he was taken to heaven and is awaiting the consummation of ages when his body will finally be saved, though this seems less probably the case. The Scripture tells us that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1Cor. 15:50) meaning that someone who is not born again by the Spirit of God has no part in the kingdom of God (cf. Jn. 3:3, 5-6). That which is born of flesh (man) is flesh (Adamic, see 1Cor. 15:48) and that which is born of the Spirit (God) is spirit (sons of God; heirs of His kingdom). Now the final part of regeneration, absolutely needed to qualify one to inherit the kingdom of God, will be seen at the last day when the dead in Christ will rise to a glorious resurrection and the living will be transformed into the image of the Son of God (cf. 1Cor. 15:42-44; Phil. 3:20, 21). In either case, there is a spiritual transformation of this mortal body and it puts on incorruption and immortality (1Cor. 15:51-53). Without such transformation there can be no part in the kingdom of God. This final transformation is also called ‘the manifestation of the sons of God’ (Rom. 8:19) which is the “glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21) and the

³⁵ C. Marvin Pate, “A Progressive Dispensationalist View of Revelation,” Ed. C. Marvin Pate, *Four Views on the Book of Revelation* (Secunderabad: OM Books, 2001), p. 169.

final adoption, i.e. “the redemption of the body” (Rom. 8:23). It is the moment when “the sons of God” will be manifested or revealed (*apokalupsis*) to the world. That is why, the Bible says: “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1Jn. 3:2, NIV). Obviously, this is an event scheduled to take place at the consummation of ages in the future, in which case, one may say, Enoch could not have experienced it prior to the time. Further, the Scripture is very clear that the firstfruits of this resurrection is Jesus Christ, whose resurrection is the ground for the resurrection of those who put their faith on Him (cf. 1Cor. 15:20-23). In which case, Enoch could not have been transformed when Christ had not even been born. But this fixation of events in time disregards the eternal significance and dimension of the work of Christ. It limits the effects of Christ’s work to the time following Him as if His death and resurrection was similar to any temporal work. However, the Bible makes it very clear that the sacrifice of Christ was not a mere temporal work; it had an infinitely deeper spiritual dimension. Jesus offered Himself without spot to God through the eternal Spirit (Heb. 9:14), that is why His sacrifice could bridge the infinite chasm between man and God created by sin; that is also how He disannulled the penalty of eternal punishment in the moment of sacrifice. He alone could be our sin-offering that takes away the sin of the world and the source of our new life since He as God was infinite in being and, therefore, able to atone infinitely and also defeat death, bringing out a new creation out of it through the resurrection. His sacrifice was not just a physical event; it was a spiritual event that spanned all time by transcending it. That is the reason why its effects are undiminishing and equal through all time – past, present, and future. That is how the Old Testament saints were saved and that is reason for which the transformation of both Enoch and Elijah could not have been an impossibility. In such case, their transformation would have preceded Christ’s resurrection in time, but not in sequence. The firstfruits was Christ and theirs was only based on the work of Christ. Anyway, the Word definitely says that “by faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death” meaning that he will also not die anymore and the Word of God is true without doubt.

Now before his translation (i.e. being carried over to heaven) he had this testimony,³⁶ says the Word, that he pleased God. This testimony, according to the writer, is proof of the faith of Enoch since “without faith it is impossible to please Him”; therefore, it is evident that Enoch was taken to heaven by faith. This, however, doesn’t mean that if anyone had faith to be taken away, he or she will be taken away (of course, all should have the blessed hope). Enoch was taken away by God’s choice, not Enoch’s choice. It is not said that he believed and prayed for him to be taken away, but it’s clear that he had faith in God and walked with God. However, there is room to wonder if Enoch, himself having the prophetic vision of Christ’s return with his saints, ever wondered what it would mean to be translated in an instant to glory. Yet, that was what he himself experienced because he knew beyond doubt that Christ’s return with the saints was a fact ordained in history, implying the knowledge that death was not the final end of God’s people.

ETERNAL DIMENSION OF CHRIST’S WORK

UNITY

Christ as the Ground of all existence binds past, present, and future together in His Acts.

INFINITY

Christ as eternal and unbounded by time and space has infinite effects by His Acts. His Acts are not in time for if it were so time must have existed before He could have created the world. Therefore, His Acts are boundlessly effective. They bear the stamp of His infinite character.

TRANSCENDENTALITY

Christ’s Acts were unbounded in effect by the rigors of material time and space. He worked by the power of the Infinite Spirit and not by material force.

IMMUTABILITY

Christ’s Acts are eternally immutable bearing the stamp of His immutable character and being unaffected by finite and contingent creation.

NECESSITY

Christ’s Acts are free from all contingencies. He is neither impelled nor compelled but freely acts according to His Sovereign will. He is not unpredictable because He is true and His Acts flow from His character and set purposes.

³⁶ The Greek word for witness, testimony, and testify is *martureo* (μαρτυρέω) from which our English word *martyr* comes and is used 5 times in Hebrews 11. *Martyr* originally meant a witness but since many of the early Christian witnesses were killed for their faith, *martyr* came to denote someone who dies for his faith.

WALK TO WONDERLAND

The Bible says that Enoch walked with God for over three hundred years (Gen. 5:22) and then, suddenly, one day “he was not found” because God took him away to heaven. The Septuagint (LXX) renders “And Enoch walked with God” as “And Enoch pleased God” (*euerestesen de Enoch to Theo*).³⁷ The writer of Hebrews is, obviously, quoting the Septuagint when saying about Enoch that “before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.” To walk with God meant to please Him since to walk with Him meant to walk in conformity to His desire and will. The opposite of walking *with* Him would be walking *against* Him, which is characteristic of unbelievers. The characteristics of this walk are explicit in the words “seek”, “come to”, and “please Him”.

He's near Us

The writer says that without faith it is impossible to please God; for he who comes to Him must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. The Greek word *ekzeteo* (ἐκζητέω) literally means “to seek out”, the word being a compound of *ek* (out) and *zeteo* (to seek). This reveals not just the inquisitive and investigating nature of the faith of God but also the imperative to ‘seek out’ the truth or keep seeking till the true answer is found. Why should there even be a concern to seek for something unless it already exists by nature of the design of things? This, obviously, is the unsolved problem of secular philosophy. For instance, if immortality is mythical, why should man have the desire to seek for it? But the imperative of seeking God is infinitely stronger than the quest for immortality? In fact, an immortality deprived of the experience of God would be blank and void or, to be more specific, hellish. There, definitely, exists a deep hunger for the absolute source of eternal life, who is God, and this can be fulfilled by the experience of the true God alone. However, if someone supposes that neither God nor immortality existed then this hunger will have to be explained in contingent terms as some, for instance, have tried to do when they have related it to the natural instincts of sex,

³⁷ εὐηρέστησεν δὲ Ενωχ τῷ θεῷ

reproduction, and evolutionism.³⁸ But, obviously, both God and immortality are far beyond the contingent constrictions of this world, and so to explain this hunger in contingent terms doesn't solve the problem at all, and it is also incomprehensible to believe how contingent objects of this world were meant to satisfy this abysmal hunger. It is irrational to suppose that something can be satisfied by something not meant for it.

Obviously, the signs of this hunger are present in every religion of the world. However, the Bible tells us that in many of these cases the real appetite for God has been suppressed by magnifying false passions of this world (cf. Rom. 1:18-31). It is like a drug addict who loses his true appetite to the craving for drugs. Certainly, such false procedures cannot help us in the path of truth. One must truly seek the Lord and Him alone primarily, in order to find Him. For faith must not have a false object; its object must be truth and truth is one. Even Krishna in his liberalism and generosity for world religions shows his reserves in this matter. Observe some of his words, for instance, from the *Bhagavad Gita*:³⁹

By whatever way men worship Me, even so do I accept them; for, in all ways, O Partha, men walk in My path (IV. 11).

Whatever form a particular devotee wishes to worship with faith – concerning that alone I make his faith unflinching. Endowed with that faith, he worships that deity, and from him gets his desires, which are indeed granted by Me alone. But that fruit of these men of little understanding has an end; the worshippers of gods go to the gods, (but) My devotees come to Me (VII. 21-23).

Even those devotees of other gods who worship (them) endowed with faith, worship Me alone, O son of Kunti (Arjuna), though in an unauthorized way (IX. 23).

The words “that fruit of these men of little understanding has an end,” “(but) My devotees come to Me,” and “devotees of other gods...worship Me alone...though in an unauthorized way” demonstrate the exclusivist tendencies of *Gita*’s pluralism. One can’t

³⁸ As in the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud and the philosophy of the will in Arthur Schopenhauer.

³⁹ *Bhagavad Gita*, trans. Swami Vireshwarananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1974).

be rational and still escape being exclusivist with regard to truth somehow. All ways cannot, therefore, be the same and lead to the same goal as Krishna himself confesses that “the worshippers of gods go to the gods, (but) My devotees come to Me.”

Therefore, God alone must be the object of the faith of God that seeks Him and must find Him in order to rightly resolve its desperation. This also means that the seeking must be on the right track and the finding must be of the real one. Man’s religiosity (a term that denotes man’s nature of seeking for God) doesn’t absolve him from his responsibility to the truth. This responsibility involves a rational evaluation of our beliefs. That is what Paul intended to say to the Athenians on the Areopagus when he said:

The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of Heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands, nor is served with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives life and breath and all things to all. And He has made all nations of men of one blood to dwell on all the face of the earth, ordaining fore-appointed seasons and boundaries of their dwelling, to seek the Lord, if perhaps they might feel after Him and find Him, though indeed He is not far from each one of us. For in Him we live and move and have our being, as also certain of your own poets have said, For we are also His offspring. Then being offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like gold or silver or stone, engraved by art and man's imagination. Truly, then, God overlooking the times of ignorance, now He strictly commands all men everywhere to repent (Act 17:24-30, MKJV).

Notice that it is God who ordained the times and habitations of men so that they may “seek the Lord, if perhaps they might feel after Him and find Him, though indeed He is not far from each one of us.” In such case, therefore, “we ought not to think that the Godhead” can be represented in forms of human imagination. Consequently, God calls men to repent from all false procedures of religion. Thus, “seeking out” (*ekzeteo*) God is mandatory and obligatory for man.

The phrase “seek the Lord” has profound meaning in Hebrew tradition as is evident from its usage in the Old Testament (Dt. 4:29; Ezra 6:21; Ps. 34:10; 105:3; 105:4; Prov. 28:5; Amos 5:6). It doesn’t mean searching for God as if He is lost or unknown to us. In fact, the

seeking is because God is already present in the knowledge *a priori* though, perhaps, in a vague way. That is why Paul says to the Romans about the gentiles that they were guilty because “when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened” (Rom. 1:21). Biblically speaking, God is not totally unknown to the human spirit. That is why when the Gospel is presented to him, he instantly recognizes the truth. However, this doesn’t mean that the preaching of the Gospel doesn’t face the problem of hindrance caused by the blindness imposed by the devil through falsehood communicated through false religion and tradition (cf. 2Cor. 4:3, 4). But when the Gospel is preached, one who has faith immediately accepts it not because he rationally grasps it but because he spiritually recognizes it by faith. Therefore, Paul, talking of his conversion, says: “But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood”(Gal 1:15-16). Obviously, for Paul the instant of the revelation dispelled all previous antagonism against the Gospel of Christ from his heart and he didn’t need to consult people in order to seek confirmation or understanding of it.

It is like a baby hungry for milk, who when given it immediately recognizes it because the hunger was unalterably connected to the milk beforehand, i.e. *a priori*. Thus, when Paul preaches to the Athenian crowd at Areopagus, he doesn’t say that they were ignorant of God; instead, he recognizes their religiosity (i.e. their *a priori* understanding of God manifest in their worship of Him as the Unknown God) and says to them, “Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you” (Ac. 17:23). Evidently, though vaguely, some knowledge of God was already present to them even before Paul had to preach to them. They knew that this Unknown God existed and was involved in human history. Thus, their seeking of God was not related to the investigation of whether He existed or not. In fact, such a quest would be rather impossible for that would require them to check all parts of the universe which would require infinite time and lead to infinite knowledge, of course; something that was the most impossible. And still, even if one was unable to

find material proofs of Him in this world, this could not disprove the hypothesis that He existed as some other form of being. Obviously, faith in God must precede seeking God. Therefore, the seeking is not at all in order to find out whether God exists or not. It begins with and from faith. That is why the writer of Hebrews says that “he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:5, MKJV). Thus, seeking God doesn’t refer to searching for Him as if for someone lost or unknown to us. It is obvious that God cannot be lost and if He were really totally unknown to us then how would we recognize that it is He when we find Him? It is we who have become blind (groping for Him in the darkness) though surrounded by Him all the time. Thus, “seeking out” doesn’t refer to trying to know whether God exists or not. It starts with the faith that God exists and rewards His people. Seeking out God diligently is, then, an act of faith.

The phrase “seek the Lord”⁴⁰ usually occurs in the Old Testament in the sense of seeking God to see His power and glory (Ps. 63:1-2), to know His will in a particular matter (2 Sam. 21:1), of worshipping Him (Ex. 33:7; 2 Ch. 11:16), seeking to follow His will (1Ch. 28:9; 2Ch. 14:4, 7), and seeking God for an answer to prayer (2 Ch. 20:3ff; Ps. 34:4). The Bible requires that we seek God not casually but “diligently”, i.e. with all the heart and soul (Dt. 4:29). This flows from a sense that nothing but God can satisfy the infinite hunger for love and holiness, as Augustine confessed “Thou hast made us for Thee and our heart is unquiet till it finds its rest in Thee.”⁴¹ David seeks God desperately in Psalm 63 as a man thirsty for water in a parched and dry land. Thus, whether it is seeking God in prayer, worship, study of His Word, or knowing and doing His will, it should be whole heartedly and persistently.

The Word tells us that God is the rewarder of those that diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6). In fact, unless one believes this he can neither seek God nor come near to Him. This implies that faith is personal. It is not faith in some blind, cosmic power but in a personal God who attends to the calls of those who trust Him. Unless one has this

⁴⁰ The Hebrew word for “seek” is *baqash* and means “to seek”, “to request”, “to beseech”, “to inquire”, “to ask”, “to beg”, and “to desire” and other things.

⁴¹ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Vernon J. Bourke; Ed. Roy Joseph D., *The Fathers of the Church* (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1953), p. 4

faith one cannot please God or walk with Him. Of course, there is no sense of talking about pleasing or walking with some blind and impersonal cosmic power. The believer is personally related to God through faith. Further, one must also remember that God only rewards those who diligently seek Him. Obviously, a reward has no meaning if some effort has not been made to get it. The word “reward” itself means return, recompense, retribution, and requital. Thus, it can only follow some action towards it. Evidently, then faith is also active and full of the efforts of faith. Therefore, Jas. tells us that “as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (Jas. 2:26). The effort of faith that God rewards is the effort of seeking to know and do His will. That alone is the true form of worshipping and honoring Him (cf. Rom. 12:1-2). All such labor will never go unnoticed and unrewarded as the Scripture says “God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love” (Heb. 6:10). This, it must be remembered, is not a preaching of salvation by works of the Law; because “by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight” (Rom. 3:20, ASV). No man can be justified by the works of the law for “by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20). In other words, man already stands condemned before the court of God. Therefore, he can’t point to some or many of his good works and claim justification in the same manner that a thief cannot claim justification by referring to some of his works of generosity. And so the Scripture says, “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal. 3:10), and again “whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all” (Jas. 2:10). Thus, by the works of the Law shall no man be justified; instead, “the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe” (Gal. 3:22). The one who bases his righteousness on the literal Law of God, therefore, stands condemned since he cannot keep the Law. The works of faith, on the other hand, are never intended to prove self-righteousness but to demonstrate and work out one’s faith in the goodness and righteousness of God. It is the intent and act of seeking to know and do God’s will, therefore, that constitutes the core of a seeking faith. And such faith will be duly rewarded.

Space Is Not the Limit

The second element of this walk with God is coming to Him or approaching Him as is indicated by the words “he who comes to God” (v. 6). However, coming to God doesn’t imply going to certain places where He may be found as if He could be found only in certain places. God is not limited by space. In fact, the rational law “objects occupy space” doesn’t apply to Him, even for the sake of both rational and empirical consistency; for to say God is connected to space as material things are connected to it is to say that space is co-eternal with God, which is attributing to space a quality that can only belong to God; secondly, knowing now that space is a material dimension,⁴² we cannot apply it to God who is the source of all kinds of being, including space-time. God’s infinity exceeds the material limits and dimensions of space-time. He is above and beyond this all. He fills both heaven and earth, as King Solomon said at the dedication of the temple at Jerusalem, “Behold, Heavens and heaven of the heavens cannot contain You! How much less this house which I have built?” (2 Ch. 6:18, MKJV). God, not being limited by space, is omnipresent, i.e. everywhere. Therefore, coming to God is not to be understood in materialistic terms. Coming to God doesn’t mean to visit a temple or holy place. God is approachable anywhere; one only needs to draw near to Him in spirit and truth (Jn. 4:21, 23) and He will draw near to him (Jas. 4:8) for He is found of them that seek Him (Dt. 4:29). God is the “exceeding great reward” of all who seek Him in spirit and truth (cf. Gen. 15:1).

There are several things, however, that this act of approaching entails; and one must be able to know them in order to see the significance of the faith of God that draws one closer to God. First of all, faith gives us access into the presence of God. It is faith that bridges the chasm between God and man and brings him close to God. It is evident that a distance exists between God and man; that is the reason why, it is necessary for man to come near to God “though He is not far from each one of us”. The problem about this distance is man himself. It is man’s sin that puts up a wall between God and

⁴² Einstein’s Special theory of relativity was first proposed in two papers published in 1905.

man (Isa. 59:2). This separation is not a physical separation; it is a spiritual separation (also referred to as spiritual death) and is characterized by a violent enmity against God in the spirit (Col. 1:21). This is an undeniable malady in man; in fact, the Bible calls denial of sin as self-deception (1Jn. 1:8, 10). The fact of this human malady (evil tendency) is not just a Christian doctrine. For instance, Glaucon in Plato's *Republic* tells the story of a young shepherd named Gyges who, one day, found a ring that could make him invisible. Soon, he entered the palace by means of it, seduced the queen, murdered the king and took the kingdom. "Suppose now that there were two such magic rings," says Glaucon, "and the just put on one of them and the unjust the other; no man can be imagined to be of such an iron nature that he would stand fast in justice." Then, proceeding to prove that all human show of justice doesn't prove man to be just, he argues:

No man would keep his hands off what was not his own when he could safely take what he liked out of the market, or go into houses and lie with any one at his pleasure, or kill or release from prison whom he would, and in all respects be like a God among men. Then the actions of the just would be as the actions of the unjust; they would both come at last to the same point. And this we may truly affirm to be a great proof that a man is just, not willingly or because he thinks that justice is any good to him individually, but of necessity, for wherever anyone thinks that he can safely be unjust, there he is unjust.⁴³

Studies in the psychology of evil, in the past few decades, have shown that crime escalates where anonymity prevails,⁴⁴ proving the internality of human sinfulness and tendency towards evil when things seem conducive. This inherent tendency towards evil is what is described in the Bible as the carnal mind set on the things of the flesh and sold under sin (Rom. 7:14) and set in enmity against the

⁴³ Plato, *The Republic and Other Works*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York: Anchor Books, 1989), p. 44

⁴⁴ For instance, studies conducted by Philip Zimbardo, Professor of Psychology at Stanford University, show that by introducing elements of anonymity and dehumanization, propensity and intensity of crime can be affected. www.zimbardo.com; www.prisonxp.org.

Law of God; therefore, in enmity against God (Rom. 8:17). For us in the New Testament, this unsurpassable wall of separation is broken down by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ who satisfied the demands of the Law in His flesh and brought us into fellowship with God (Eph. 2:14-16). Only His sacrifice could do that as only He, being the embodiment of infinite deity and untainted by Adamic guilt through the virgin birth, could be a true mediator between God and man as the Scripture says:

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having a high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water (Heb. 10:19-22).

Thus, we know that it is through Jesus Christ that we have access into the presence of God (Eph. 3:12) as Jesus Himself said “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father but by Me” (Jn. 14:6); which also implies that Enoch and all saints could only have access into God’s presence through the effects of Christ’s atoning sacrifice for their sins and the sins of the world. Their conscious acceptance of the revelation of God and submission to His will was in line with the acceptance of the finality of this progressive revelation in Jesus Christ (cf. Heb. 1:1, 2). Therefore, their faith in God’s will and purposes was faith in Jesus Christ as the Scriptures tell us several times, for instance, regarding the Israelites:

For also we have had the gospel preached, as well as them. But the Word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it (Heb. 4:2, MKJV).

And, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea. And all were baptized to Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank of the spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ (1Cor. 10:1-4, MKJV).

In fact, the Scriptures tell us that salvation in the Old Testament was through Christ alone, who in His pre-incarnate form as Spirit, preached to the them in various ways (Heb. 1:1) the Gospel of His death and resurrection. It was Christ who through the Spirit, for instance, preached to the people then, “when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared”; but they disobeyed and are now kept in prison for the Day of Judgment.

For Christ also once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, indeed being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit; in which also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, to disobeying ones, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared (in which a few, that is, eight souls were saved through water); which figure now also saves us, baptism; not a putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ; who is at the right hand of God, having gone into Heaven, where the angels and authorities and powers are being subjected to Him (1Pt. 3:18-22, MKJV).

It must be remembered that when we talk of Christ’s death and resurrection and His Gospel, we talk of spiritual things (cf. 1Cor. 2:13) that transcend the rigors of time and space; thus, it says “but made alive in the Spirit; in which also He went and preached...in the days of Noah.⁴⁵” In other words, the Gospel of the Spirit of Christ, though not as clear to them as to many of us, was the same bringing salvation to the saints in the Old Testament as well.

About which salvation the prophets sought out and searched out, prophesying concerning the grace for you; searching for what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ made clear within them, testifying beforehand of the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow (1Pt. 1:10-11, MKJV).

What was a shadow to them is now a reality to us, and what is now a shadow to us will be a reality in the days to come; yet, we

⁴⁵ This is the interpretation followed by most commentators like John Wesley, Matthew Henry, Albert Barnes, Adam Clarke, and John Gill.

walk in the fullness of the assurance and partake of the goodness and mercies of God: that is faith, the ability to go beyond the shadows and experience the eternal and spiritual blessings of God in Jesus Christ. The strength of this faith in the Old Testament can be seen in the fact that never once did any of the men of God claim forgiveness of sins on the basis of a sacrifice or offering they brought before God. They knew that whatever they brought could not atone for their sins. They needed the grace of God and a way that God would provide (Lam. 3:22; Dan. 9:9). They were at His mercy. In fact, the Law had no stipulation of forgiveness for intentional sins. Anyone seen breaking the Ten Commandments was condemned to death. No sacrifice could atone for him. But the prophets preached repentance and forgiveness by the grace and mercies of God. Therefore, without any doubt, salvation in the Old Testament was by faith alone; and God's way of salvation is Jesus Christ (cf. Num. 15:28; Dt. 19:4; Ex. 21:12, 15-17, 29; Isa. 1:18; Ps. 51:7; Mic. 7:19; Lk. 2:25-32). In fact, there is no doubt that the fellowship with God in the Old Testament was, in fact again, the fellowship of Christ (Mt. 22:41-45). Thus, even the Old Testament saints could have access into the presence of God by faith in God's grace and salvation. On the basis of the Law or their own works of righteousness, they could never have fellowship with God since only the high priest was allowed into the Holiest Place of the Sanctuary, once a year, and that too with the blood of a sacrifice. No one else had this privilege (Heb. 9:7). In fact, we could never have gained access beyond the veil of separation in the Sanctuary of the Law. But in Jesus Christ, we through the Spirit have unrestricted access into the presence of God (Eph. 2:18).

Secondly, faith gives us the boldness to approach God (Heb. 10:19). It is like the boldness of a child who can approach his father without any fear or hesitations. We do not just have the access but also the boldness to come before God. The boldness comes from the faith in the revelation of God's love towards us as the Scripture says: "The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee" (Jer. 31:3). It is the awareness of God's longing towards us as His children and our irresistible need of Him that draws us to Him. Boldness is the absence of guilt and anxiety. Guilt is the sense

of having failed infinitely, existentially, morally; anxiety is the sense of insecurity and infinite threat. Guilt is infinite regret because the past act cannot be undone for infinity. Anxiety is infinite apprehension because it is uncertain of any hope beyond the horrific end that is at hand. This anxiety might not necessarily be concerned with death but with the fear of an irrecoverable and hopeless experience. Guilt prevents man from coming before the presence of God as it makes one ashamed of himself for failing to be right and thus be pleasing in the sight of God (see Lk. 5:8; Job 42:5, 6). Anxiety from sin-consciousness produces the hesitation that prevents man from coming boldly to God (Gen. 3:10). Faith in the Word of God gives us boldness as it shows the goodness and mercies of God towards us. God reveals His love to us so that they who accept His love will find forgiveness of sins and healing for the past as well as assurance for the future. We have expressively seen God as Love in the face of Jesus Christ in the New Testament (1Jn. 4:8, 9). Similarly, Enoch and the other saints saw God as Love in God's revelation of Himself as "Jehovah! Jehovah God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth" (Ex. 34:6, MKJV) because God is One and is revealed to us (whether in the Old or the New Testament) only in the face of Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:18; 14:9; Gen. 32:30; Joshua 5:13-15; 2Cor. 4:6; 1Jn. 5:20). Thus, faith in God's revelation of His love casts off all guilt and fear as the Word says "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment....There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear." (1Jn. 4:17-18).

It is a tragedy, however, that there are some who have lost their consciences and exhibit a kind of impudence with disdain for the Law of God (2Tim. 3:1-4). Such impudence and insolence is nothing but false boldness that leads to fall (Prov. 16:5, 18). As seen earlier, disdain for God's Law as sign of rebellion is the result of carnal mindedness. It is all about a willing-to-believe or inclination of heart towards anything that decides the "rationality" or "intelligibility" of that thing. Therefore, to one who chooses or is drawn to disbelieve in the Law or authority of God, God's Law looks irrational, unfair, and absurd to him. Such persons will have no guilt-feelings since their consciences are dead to the Law of God. Obviously, such persons cannot find peace and joy in the presence of God. Yet, God

is merciful to allow time and opportunity to repent and His love strives with the sinner's spirit with the hope that he will turn his ways to God as the Word says "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love" (Hos. 11:4). However, the Bible warns us not to take the patience and mercies of God lightly:

And, O man... do you think this, that you shall escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of His kindness, and the forbearance and long-suffering, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But according to your hardness and your impenitent heart, do you treasure up wrath for yourself in a day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each according to his works; indeed to those who with patience in good work are seeking for glory, and honor, and incorruptibility, everlasting life. But to those who indeed disobeying the truth out of self-seeking, and obeying unrighteousness, will be anger and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man who has worked out evil.... (Rom. 2:3-9, MKJV).

But those who accept God's love into their lives are "born again" by the Spirit of God and are adopted as sons in the family of God, and as such have child-like confidence before their heavenly Father. One cannot deny that there are times when the heart will say "You should not have done it" or "Your sins are too great to be forgiven", and with such thoughts condemn us. But the Word says,

And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God (1Jn. 3:19-21).

In other words, it is possible that our hearts continue the natural way of condemning us even when our sins have already been blotted out. In such cases, faith must take the stand to affirm that the witness of God's Word is greater than the witness of one's heart. And when the heart that is steadfast in God no longer condemns, one has boldness before God; for with the removal of guilt and anxiety also comes the child-like boldness to approach God. Remember that Jesus never condemned Peter for failing Him thrice; He never mentioned it: He only asked him whether he loved Him (cf. Jn.

21:14-17). Peter replied in the affirmative and Jesus told him to take care of His sheep (the church). Peter need not be obsessed with his failures as if that was all to his life and as if God expected him to be righteous in his own power; he only needed to trust in God and be confident that God is not against us but for us if we love God and commit ourselves to His will (cf. Rom. 8:33, 34). Thus, faith gives us the boldness to enter the presence of God. By faith in God's love and rich mercies Enoch walked with God in fellowship, and, obviously, experienced each day the insurmountable blessings of His grace until, one day, his time merged into the eternity of heaven.

Attunement

The Bible tells us that Enoch “pleased God” (as seen, the LXX rendering of “walked with God”). Thus, walking with God is equivalent to pleasing God as the inspired Word confirms. And “without faith it is impossible to please Him”; therefore, Enoch pleased God not because of his works but because of his faith. The necessary connection between faith and pleasing God is revealed in the words “impossible” and “must” as follows:

But without faith it is impossible to please and be satisfactory to Him. For whoever would come near to God must [necessarily] believe that God exists and that He is the rewarder of those who earnestly and diligently seek Him [out] (Heb. 11:6, Amplified Bible).

Evidently, one cannot get around faith to please God. It is the only way available. The opposite is the way of flesh which can never seek to please God. Therefore, the works of faith are in variance against the works of the flesh. The works of faith flow from a heart that is attuned with the heart of God; the works of flesh flow from selfishness. The flesh cannot please God because it is bound and enslaved to its immediate desires and cravings (Rom. 8:8). Therefore, when the flesh tries to keep the Law of God, it externally keeps it only to suit its selfish intentions as Glaucon says in *The Republic*, “all men who practice justice do so against their will, of necessity, but not as a good.”⁴⁶ Such compulsive law-keeping is

⁴⁶ Plato, *The Republic*, p. 42.

abominable in God's sight since it doesn't come from a heart of faith; in fact, carnal worship (i.e. worship by flesh for immediate desire fulfillment) is never worship of God but the worship of an ideal of the flesh, which is idolatry. This is how the unspiritual Israelites and priests could go and worship in the temple while also doing wicked deeds everywhere; the flesh fooled them to believe that God was not concerned with all their evil deeds as long as His rituals were met, similar to the gods of the heathens. That was their false picture of God created by the flesh. This ultimately led to total departure from even the godly form of worship as the flesh found situations conducive to idolatry (Isa. 1:13, 14; Eze. 8:8-17; Ps. 94:7; Isa. 29:15), because obedience to the flesh is the same as idolatry and the worship of the flesh (Jude 16, 18).

One cannot walk with God unless one's heart is already close to God. The show of walk is not true walk. For instance, a love letter can be written by both a lover and a computer; however, it is the letter of the lover alone that pleases the beloved, not because it has better display of words, but because it comes from the lover's heart: the computer, on the contrary, having no heart,⁴⁷ only makes a show of love in words that have been programmed into it; therefore, it is incapable of love and its "love letter" is meaningless. Similarly, someone who doesn't have a heart after God cannot walk with God. Therefore, as has been seen, seeking precedes pleasing God in this walk of faith and seeking never ceases.

The word for "to please", used here, is *euaresteo* (εὐαρεστέω), whose noun form is *euarestos*, a combination of two words *eu* (good, well) and *arestos* (agreeable, fitting, pleasing); thus meaning "to please entirely" or be "well pleasing". The word *arestos* is used in Rom. 8:8 where it says, "they that are in the flesh cannot please (*arestos*) God" meaning that they who live fulfilling their fleshly

⁴⁷ Cp. "One often uses anthropomorphic terms in a descriptive, often jocular, way to describe the behaviour of machines: 'My car doesn't seem to want to start this morning'; or 'My watch still thinks it's running on Californian time'; or 'My computer claims it didn't understand that last instruction and doesn't know what to do next.' Of course we don't *really* mean to imply that the car actually might *want* something, or that the watch *thinks*, or that the computer actually *claims* anything..." Roger Penrose, *The Emperor's New Mind* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 16.

desires all the time cannot agree with God or fit His ways; in other words, they can neither walk in agreement with Him nor please Him; for to walk implies also to be in agreement with as the Word says “Can two walk together, except they be agreed” (Amos 3:3). Through the combination of *eu* with *arestos*, *euarestos* attains the meaning of being in total agreement with or being perfectly or well attuned with God. It is understandable that God cannot accept less than *euarestos* in anyone’s approaching or relating to Him. That is the reason why the Scripture uses *euarestos* and not just *arestos* when talking about pleasing God by faith. The sense is that they that are carnal minded cannot even agree with God, far be it that they can be perfectly pleasing in His sight. But the man of faith goes beyond mere agreement to a total satisfaction of divine will and pleasure. Obviously, this is not humanly or fleshly possible; it is only possible by faith and a self-giving in trust into the hands of God in total commitment. It is like the burnt-offerings of the Old Testament in which the sacrificial animal had to be totally offered and burnt on the altar. It is that which is wholly pleasing to Him. That is also what the Word calls for when it says, “present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable (*euarestos*) unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1); and again, “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable (*euarestos*), and perfect, will of God” (Rom. 12:2).

The walk of faith that pleases God must be selfless and wholly dedicated to God. But such qualities are internal and not external. That is why Romans 12:1-2 talks about reasonable (*logikos*, rational or logical) service and renewing of mind. For, unless one’s way of thinking is governed by the faith of God, his walk cannot be pleasing to God. In fact, a willing committal of self in holiness and conformity to God’s will is the only kind of service that God accepts as rational (*logikos*); all other forms of religion are meaningless before Him. It is only when the mind is renewed that the body can be offered as a living sacrifice to God (for God has no use of the dead; He needs the living to serve Him in spirit and truth). Jesus said that the internal of a vessel needs to be cleaned before the external is cleaned (Mt. 23:26). The internal must be purified by faith in God’s Word and the love of God. Obviously, the tenth commandment, “Do

not covet", deals with the internal aspect of man's moral life. It is the only law that prohibits something that is externally invisible until it manifests itself in visible forms of violating the other commandments. Only the one who covets really knows if he is coveting or not. That is why when the rich young ruler came to Jesus and asked Him what he must do to get eternal life, Jesus told him to keep the commandments, namely "do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, honor your parents, and love your neighbor as yourself." He didn't mention the first three commandments of honoring and worshipping God; neither did He mention the last commandment "do not covet", instead of which He said "love your neighbor as yourself" since love would never violate any of the commandments but would go beyond them to fulfill God's will and, thus, honor Him; for if one cannot love his neighbor then one cannot love God either (1Jn. 4:20, 21). The hideous nature of covetousness is what constitutes the anti-love element of sin in the human heart. It is the enemy of love; therefore, both of them cannot co-exist: either one must win or the other. Therefore, the carnal mind is said to be in enmity against the Law of God. But true love fulfills the whole Law of God in spirit and truth as the Scripture says:

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves another has fulfilled the Law. For: "Do not commit adultery; do not murder; do not steal; do not bear false witness; do not lust;" and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this word, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love works no ill to its neighbor, therefore love is the fulfilling of the Law (Rom. 13:8-10, MKJV).

ENOCH'S FAITH-WALK

SEEKING FAITH

Enoch sought the Lord with all his being because he knew that God is the ultimate object of knowledge, the finality of truth, and the final determiner of all true significance.

APPROACHING FAITH

Enoch's walk with God shows his faith not in himself but in the goodness and mercies of God that gave him the boldness to approach

 Him as His Lord and Savior.

PLEASING FAITH

Enoch pleased God because he walked by faith in active agreement with the truth and purposes of God.

Love doesn't just think about the letter of the commandment; it looks beyond it to its spirit. It is covetousness that looks to the letter in order to find a way to get around it and fulfill the desires of the flesh (cf. Mk. 7:10-13). Therefore, the Law was rightly given to the sinners in order to condemn them (1Tim. 1:9, 10; Rom. 3:20; 7:7, 8). It is only ludicrous when sinners use this same Law of God to accuse each other (Rom. 2:1). Remember the incident of the Pharisees bringing a woman caught in adultery to Jesus and trying Him with the question of what to do with her since the Law of Moses commanded to stone adulterers to death. There were several side-tracking complications like, for instance, the whereabouts of the man who also, obviously, was caught in the immoral act. However, Jesus didn't act like a normal scribe would have; he stooped down and started writing on the ground as if they had come to Him with a meaningless question. But when they insisted He stood up and told them "Anyone who is without sin among you may cast the first stone at her." On hearing this, and convicted by their consciences, everyone of them left the scene except the woman (Jn. 8:10). Evidently, though their external adherence to the Law might have been visible to all, their conscience did not testify that they were sinless (because lust or covetousness ruled their internal thoughts) and they knew that they were equally condemned by the Law as the woman was. In such case, their bringing her to Jesus and making a show of being protectors of the Law was absurd.

In the case of the rich young ruler, he was prompt to say that he kept all those commandments that Jesus had talked of from his childhood and inquired whether he lacked anything yet. Jesus answered him saying "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in Heaven. And come, follow Me" (Mt. 19:21, MKJV). The Bible tells us that the man went back sorrowful because he had great possessions. Obviously, this man could not get over his covetousness for the things of the world despite the fact that he was externally keeping the commandments. For the sake of such worldly desires he even disregarded the treasures of heaven. But he could not do anything else because his mind was set compulsively on the flesh and so he could not see the things of God nor place his faith in the promise of

Christ “You shall have treasure in Heaven”. Thus, it is obvious that though he was saddened by how he was proven wrong, yet his deep love for worldliness disabled him from submitting himself to God completely. Therefore, it is not the external compliance to the Law but an internal sacrifice of self and perfect attunement with the will of God that is the first step towards pleasing God. Certainly, such attunement is only possible when actions flow purely out of love for God and His ways. It is God’s love alone that can break the spell of covetousness from our hearts and get us beyond the letter (or fetter) of the Law to a free and pure service of God; for the only kind of service that is acceptable before God is the service of faith that works by love (Gal. 5:6). It was in this sense that Mother Teresa told Malcolm Muggeridge that the world lacks faith because of so much selfishness and so much gain only for self, but faith to be true must be a giving love, and love and faith go together.⁴⁸ The one thing that the young man lacked was the faith of God that operates by love. He neither cared for the poor nor for God, and he could trust neither because of his lack of faith. Teresa’s perspective is the contrary as she says: “Our life of poverty is as necessary as the work itself” and then again “Only in heaven we will see how much we owe to the poor for helping us to love God better because of them.”⁴⁹ Obviously, it is not an attraction towards some utopian treasures or pleasures in heaven but the love of Christ that drew her to serve the poor. It was because of this that Muggeridge says, “Every day Mother Teresa meets Jesus”, i.e. at not just the Mass but also in “each needing, suffering soul she sees and tends.”⁵⁰ Her own confession of this faith in God is overwhelming as, in her, love and action combine in her faith. She says:

Faith is a gift of God. Without it there would be no life. And our work, to be fruitful and to be all for God, and beautiful, has to be built on faith. Faith in Christ who has said, ‘I was hungry, I was

⁴⁸ Malcolm Muggeridge, *Something Beautiful for God* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1971), p. 92.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 55.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 108.

naked, I was sick, and I was homeless and you did that to me.' On these words of his all our work is based.⁵¹

Obviously, faith here goes beyond the carnal craving of those who look at the reward of faith as some carnal pleasure and luxury in heaven. In fact, the Bible never talks of such reward. The reward of the faith of God is God Himself; for, it is God alone whom faith seeks and approaches and finally pleases. Therefore, the apostle tells the believers to do whatever they do, heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men (Col. 3:23); for our attitudes and intentions matter more than our words and actions. The "LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1Sam. 16:7, NIV). There will be many on the Day of Judgment who'll say to Jesus that they did mighty works of wonders in His name, but He'll deny them since it is only those who do the will of God that are known by Him in an intimate way that pleases Him (Mt. 7:21-23). Lusts and passions may come (uncalled for many times) but it is the resolute act of faith that alone overcomes the world (1Jn. 5:3, 4). Thus, one can see how by faith Enoch pleased God and was translated that he should not see death. His faith possessed the qualities of completeness, absoluteness, and finality leaving no possibilities for a turn around. It was incessantly inquisitive, infinitely intimate, and inextricably integrated with God's will; therefore, it was testified of him that he pleased God, and so will it be of everyone that blends his life completely with the fire of God's will on the altar of His love, by faith to the glory of His grace (Eph. 1:6) who is the only One who can be absolutely trusted forever. Amen!

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

1. Through faith one inherits the eternal salvation of God which is eternally available to all in the past, present, and future, through Christ Jesus.

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 90.

2. To walk by faith is the same as pleasing God.
3. Faith recognizes God's truth in the same way that a thirsty man receives pure water.

CHAPTER FIVE

Ship without Sails

“By faith Noah...prepared an ark to the saving of his house”
(Heb. 11:7).

The action-nature of faith is recurrently stressed throughout this chapter in words like “by faith Abel offered”, “by faith Noah built an ark”, “by faith Abraham went out”, and so on. In each case, faith is known by its works which is the only way it can be known, as James challenges the hypocrites: “Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do” (Jas. 2:18, NIV). Faith is both internally consistent and empirically verifiable; that is the reason why a trial of faith is possible (cf. 1Pt. 1:7). Faith is internally consistent in the sense that within itself it is free from any shadow of doubt, ambiguity, or contradiction with regard to truth: obviously, faith can only relate to its object if it has no double-mindedness about it. Secondly, faith is also empirically verifiable, i.e., you can always verify the presence or absence of faith in a pragmatic way. For instance, Peter’s beginning to sink in the water revealed his shattering of faith by buckling under fear (Mt. 14:30, 31). The internal variance surfaced in external difference. Therefore, the Scripture says that one is as he thinks in his heart (Prov. 23:7), which also means that one’s quality of conduct is defined by one’s attitude of thinking. Eventually, one’s experiences are determined by one’s attitude towards truth, especially the truth of God. This attitudinal difference was what distinguished the warriors of faith from the victims of flesh (or circumstances). As far as physical structure, mental capacity, and emotional stability was concerned one could not make a huge difference between both of them. However, history is witness to the fact that their differences lie in what each has done to history. In Noah’s case, history was reinvented when God invented Noah’s ship without sails; and he put the design together with wood, pitch, and nails.

The Biblical portrayal of Noah’s time is a pathetic one. Here is first mentioned that God repented for having made man and was very grieved at heart because of what man had made of himself

(Gen. 6:6). The literary picture “God repented” expresses the depth of grief man had caused God by his evil works. Man was doomed to death by the sentence of Justice; and yet, the dark influence of evil was so tense and dense in the human heart that the light of God’s grace seemed a dismal ray obliterated by the wrench of wickedness (cf. Gen. 6:5-7; Rom. 1:18, 32). For it does say that Noah preached righteousness to these people (2Pt. 2:5) and that the Spirit of God strived with them (Gen. 6:3), in case they might turn their ways to God but they were indurate with a stone-like coldness to the mercies of God. It is reasonable to assume that God gave up striving with the people before deciding to destroy them and apparent from His plan revealed to Noah. In which case, it is also reasonable to assume that Noah was a preacher of righteousness not merely after getting the mandate to build the ark but even before it. But the world had now become a bag filthy refuse. Even those who came from a godly background had corrupted themselves by disregarding both God and conscience (Gen. 6:2, 4).⁵² The Bible says that every imagination of the thought of man’s heart was evil continually (Gen. 6:5). In other words, there were no intervals of evil. Good had lost both its voice and hold over men’s hearts. Man’s heart had become an unceasing lab of evil designs and inventions. It is not easy to imagine Noah’s day in our age with scores of Christian T.V. channels, radio programs, magazines, books, churches, ministers, godly believers, Christian artists, statesmen, and other Christian presences besides: in Noah’s day, it was Noah alone and his family; the whole world had

⁵² Augustine interpreted “sons of God” as the children of the line of Seth, i.e. citizens of the heavenly city, and “daughters of men” as the children of the line of Cain. This would imply that such union between believers and unbelievers had corrupted the whole race (not physically but spiritually), since it is obvious that the people of God, like later Israelites, had fallen to lust. He dismisses the contention that the giants were the offspring of the union between women and angels by referring to the phrase “in those days, *and also after that*” which indicates that giants existed even before Seth’s children married Cain’s children. He gives examples of giants in his own days who had parents of normal size and height. We now know that genetic changes can produce such giants or even dwarfs, and giants are not necessarily of divine or demonic origin as the myths described. Obviously, angels were never made for copulation and reproduction (cp. Mt. 22:30) and, if God did not create them so, it was impossible for them to design themselves physical bodies with such internal members to effect what some interpreters imagine irrationally. See Augustine, *City of God*, pp. 511-540.

fallen beside and turned wicked beyond repair – no government, no rules, no human rights protection, no conscience; good was absent and evil was ubiquitous. One can only imagine how hostile everything was against faith. But in face of all this, Noah obtained the witness of having found favor in God's eyes, of condemning the world, and becoming a heir of God's righteousness by faith. His faith, like the ark he was going to make, didn't need sails to propel it forward; in fact, the winds of this world could never be kind on the sails of faith – they would only seek to sink it down. But Noah's faith was set to sail on the winds of God's grace, whom he obeyed without a question.

RUDDER OF REVERENCE

The Scripture says that “by faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house” (Heb. 11:7). The phrase “moved with fear” is actually one word in the Greek, *eulabetheis* (ευλαβηθεις) which is in the middle voice and carries the meaning of conducting oneself carefully, cautiously, and circumspectly with reverence towards God. This is not the kind of fear that arises out of the animal survival instinct. The animal instinct for survival that every living organism has produces the emotion of fear in man. When faced with danger, such fear triggers large amounts of adrenaline into the bloodstream and prepares the organism for immediate action.⁵³ Obviously, Noah's fear was not this kind of instinctual fear because there were no visible signs of danger around him for the many years while the ark was being built; in fact, he was moved with fear after being warned of God of “things not seen as yet”. Thus, it was not this animal kind of fear. On the other hand, it was also not anxiety, or fear of some unknown thing with a sense of an inability to control the future and feelings of hopelessness. Noah's fear was not fear of the unknown because God had already revealed to him that He was going to destroy the world with a flood and had also shown him His

⁵³ This doesn't mean that such fear is not possible without physiological triggering; for, even demons are said to tremble before God though they do not possess physical bodies. But in our case, fear triggers physiological changes to prepare the body for action; for instance, while walking on the road one is suddenly frightened by a vehicle's horn from behind and instantly jumps aside.

plan of saving him by the ark (Gen. 6:13-17). Obviously, then anxiety was not the kind of fear that he had. To the contrary, his was a reverential fear of God that circumspectly defined his lifestyle. The fear of God was his motivation for obeying God diligently.

This fear of God proceeded from faith, i.e. the faith of God; for it says “by faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear.” In other words, this kind of a fear of God can only proceed from faith in God. It is unlike the fear that the demons have (Jas. 2:19); for though they believe that God exists they do not have the faith of God and so have no reverence for Him; instead, they shudder and tremble at His presence out of an instinctual fear related to their concern for themselves and not a regard for God. The word for “warned of God” is again one word in the Greek, *chrematistheis* (χρηματισθεῖς) and is used 9 times in the New Testament, each time referring to a revelation, a warning or a labeling by God. Thus, for instance, the wise men were *chrematisthentes* in a dream that they should not return to Herod (Mt. 2:12); Cornelius was *echrematisthe* by an angel to send for Peter (Ac. 10:22); the disciples were first *chrematisai* as Christians at Antioch (Ac. 11:26);⁵⁴ and Moses was *chechrematistai* to follow the blueprint of the tabernacle that was shown to him by God (Heb. 8:5). Evidently, God spoke to Noah through one or more of His many ways. It may have been through a dream or a vision or through an angel; we are not certain how; but, it is clear that Noah never doubted God’s revelation. He believed and obeyed God. The revealed truth, indubitably, was prophetic as it says “of things not seen as yet”, i.e. of things to come. The fear, as has already been seen, was not a fear of portended evil that drove Noah to build the ark. It was a fear that came from an apprehension of God’s mission-related revelation by faith. That is to say that God’s word to Noah came with a mission for him to complete; Noah took that mandate and cautiously (fearfully) worked out the task. For Noah, as for any of us, it is the fear of God that gives direction and

⁵⁴ Which implies that the name “Christian” is not of human origin but of divine as the usage of the verb *chrematizo* indicates. The Greek tense, number, mood, person, and voice is known from the different inflections of the main verb form, here *chrematizo* is the main verb form and the other renderings show tense, number, mood, person, and voice in which it must be understood.

meaning to life. It is the rudder that drives our lives forward towards God's goal; propelled by the arms of faith.

True Reverence is Obedient

Only reverential fear can obey God first before even seeking to understand the rationality of the commandment. It is so since only the word of the Lord has ultimate sense and significance for a heart of faith. All that is needed is that the commandment be clear; every other thing is only secondary. A classic example of this godly fear is found in Abraham. When God asked him to take his only son Isaac to Moriah and offer him to God on one of the mountains that He would specify, Abraham obeyed without any questioning whatsoever (Gen. 22:2, 3). The reason was not because Abraham believed in human sacrifice but because he knew the promise of God that God would make a nation from Isaac (Gen. 15:4, 5; 21:12). This faith was what made him tell his two servants near Mt. Moriah to tarry there as he and the lad go to worship and will come back to them (Gen. 22:5). He didn't say "we'll go and I'll come back" but "we'll worship and come back to you" because he knew that even if Isaac died God will have to raise him up to keep His promise which He could never break. This faith is also obvious in his answer to his son when he asked "Father, we have the wood and the fire but where is the lamb for the offering?" Abraham answered, "God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son" (Gen. 22:7, 8). The movies paint a false picture of this episode when they show that Abraham was filled with grief when God gave him this command. The Bible never tells us this about our father of faith. Abraham never doubted the voice or character of God for even a split of a second. Neither was God's command grievous to him for he knew the finality of the faith of God who never fails in perfection. People of the world submit to the orders of their captains and leaders by faith that they know better or have the right to command their obedience; yet, none of these leaders are perfect. If worldly men could so be feared and obeyed, even if it be for the sake of smooth governance, how much more should our faith be obedient to the only wise and true God. Abraham believed God and acted in reverent obedience to Him; therefore, God testified to him saying "now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your

only one, from Me" (Gen. 22:12, MKJV). And Abraham looked and saw before him a ram caught in a thicket by its horns; he took it and offered it as a burnt-offering instead of his son. This is the kind of godly fear that prompts obedience to God's command.

Godly fear is a sense of awe and reverence from a vision of God's holiness, power, and love. The world knows two kinds of reverence: true reverence and faked one. True reverence is that which comes from the heart while faked reverence is hypocritical. It is axiomatically true that no one who really knows God can ever fake reverence before Him. Only they will attempt to deceive God who do not know Him as the maker and discerner of hearts (Ps. 94:7-9). Therefore, the opposite of godly fear is ungodly rebellion. It is inevitable that Noah, being moved by godly fear, constantly warned his generation of the judgment to come on earth while he reverentially prepared the ark (2Pt. 2:5). However, none of them but his family responded to the message of God. Their stance was that of open rebellion. It reveals the condition of their sinful heart that had lost its capacity to either blush or bristle at the divine indictment (cf. Rev. 9:20, 21). They could not fear God because they did not believe Him. And they did not believe Him because they did not want to fear Him. That is the contradiction of human rebelliousness; man demands of God to give him evidences so that he can believe in Him, but if the same were demanded of him, his answer would beg the question and run into a whirlpool of blank reasoning. A true atheist is never rational; for if he were he could not be an atheist, since denying God is equivalent to making a universal statement which is only possible on grounds that the maker of the statement possessed universal or infinite knowledge, which being not true, the atheist's belief in God's non-existence is rationally unsustainable. An atheist, therefore, is not an atheist by virtue of rational deduction but because of his unwillingness to believe in God. In fact, no one can be rational and deny God; even the agnostic is being careless if he keeps on saying that he doesn't know whether God exists or not. This doesn't mean that God is known by reason, but that faith in God is necessary to sustain reason and ultimately the rationality of life. Therefore, the Scripture says about the unbelievers that though "they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish

heart was darkened" (Rom. 1:21) as the Word also says in Genesis that "the imaginations of the thoughts of their heart was evil continually." But the loss of reason also means the loss of sense and meaning.

Two disturbing characters in the Bible who ended their lives in suicide were King Saul and Judas Iscariot. Both of them were chosen by God. Both of them saw the power and majesty of God. Yet, both rebelled absurdly against God (1Sam. 15; 18:28, 29; 28:6, 7; Mt. 26:14-16). The former fell on his own sword after realizing he could no longer fight against the armies of God (1Sam. 31:4). The latter fell into remorse after betraying our Lord and hanged himself to death (Mt. 27:3-5). In either case, they chose not to come back to God and humbly seek His forgiveness and mercy. Their rebellion was rebellion because they knew God earlier and showed their submission to Him, but later giving in to their own fleshly lusts they lost sight of God and fell into the irrational and unnatural desires of the flesh: the one wanted to retain a kingdom that God had taken away from him and the other acquiesced to sell the Messiah for just 30 pieces of silver; if this was not irrational then irrationality will need to be redefined. Consequently, their failure to cope with the senselessness of their own rebellion drove them to suicide. Any work or mission that has not the sanction of God is ill-driven and ultimately senseless. For it is bound to self-destruction since no one can rebel successfully against the Source of life and intelligence; no one can fight against truth and remain intact as the Word says "Since they have rejected the word of the LORD, what kind of wisdom do they have?" (Jer. 8:9, NIV). In fact, we can have some hope for the man who cuts the branch on which he sits but never for one who thinks that he can rationally rebel against truth. Therefore, without godliness it is impossible to rationally cope with life.

Faith Makes Sense

Noah's construction of the ark, obviously, made no sense to most people of his day. Similarly, serving God seems nonsensical to many in our own day. Jesus said that our days would be like the days of Noah (Lk. 17:26); for as the people of Noah's days never took the words of Noah seriously, so does this generation disregard the Gospel of Christ. In a vigorously materialistic age, all godly work is

naturally set to be despised by worldly men as it is done. But the man of faith knows that God's work in this world is more important than the world itself, a view that'll cause constipation to materialists. While people everywhere were building houses and making future plans, Noah was building the ark. He knew the futility of their works while they thought that he was crazy. We can only imagine the milieu of Noah's ministry since the Scripture only tells us that the people of his generation were disobedient or unbelieving (1Pt. 3:20). Obviously, people had many reasons to give for disbelieving in Noah's preaching. There had neither been a universal flood before nor were any signs of such an impending flood visible. If God wanted to save people, He could do that without an ark for nothing was impossible for Him. Why would He need a human to help Him in constructing the means of salvation and wait till the work be over? There were no signs or miracles as proofs of God's existence and He never appeared to any. If a flood were to come it would be predictable, and several such arguments could have been brought to disannul Noah's preaching. But God is not interested to provide evidences for and answers for the questions of those who have made up their mind not to believe. The people's own wickedness and the revelation of divine wrath through Noah's preaching were evidence enough as the Word says "Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says.' And whether they listen or fail to listen – for they are a rebellious house – they will know that a prophet has been among them" (Eze. 2:4-5, NIV). That is the reason even why Jesus didn't give a defense of Himself at His trial; in fact, Herod had wanted to see some miracle but Jesus didn't answer him (Lk. 23:8-9). God doesn't fulfill the desires of the unbelieving heart but if there is someone who seeks Him in spirit and truth, God readily answers him (Ps. 91:14, 15). It is only an irreverent heart that demands of God answers to its carnal questions. In fact, all such rebellious talk and action will be judged in the Day of Judgment as is said "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him" (Jude 1:14-15).

If one wishes to live a real life he must give himself to serve God through obedience to His Word; for the pursuit of worldly gain at the loss of one's own soul is a foolish business as Jesus said "For what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mk. 8:36); the proverb also says likewise that "riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death" (Prov. 11:4). For the purpose of a thing is not determined by the thing itself but by its maker who made it with a purpose for himself or for someone else. Similarly, the Scripture says that God made the universe through Christ and for Christ that He might be the head over all things subjected to Him by the Father (Col. 1:16-18). Rebellion is the self-imagination and determination of one's meaning for oneself; it is the rejection of God's definition of what life was meant to be. But all such determinations are foiled by death and will be proved false on the Day of Judgment. It is therefore crucial for us to stop hardening our hearts and listen to the voice of the Spirit today (Heb. 3:7); for the Spirit strives with us through the preaching of the Gospel convincing, convicting, and calling us to repentance (Gen. 6:3; Jn. 16:8; Heb. 2:3, 4) as the Scripture says:

O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your heart... (Ps. 95:6-8).

It is only in obedience to this Spirit of grace that our lives can really make sense. This was what distinguished Noah from the people of his day. He knew his Maker and knew the logic of life in the service and worship of his Maker.

SAIL OR SINK!

By his act of faith Noah condemned the world (Heb. 11:7). It is not well known how big the world then was; though it may be supposed that there was just one large land mass surrounded by sea on all sides and the world was undivided. It may also be calculated that there were above or less than 1 crore (10 million) people on the earth. Whatever be the case, it is apparent that the news of Noah's message and ship-engineering was in wide circulation in those days from what the Scriptures tell us about Noah's preaching to and

condemning the world for their disobedience (cf. 1Pt. 3:20). The statement “by the which he condemned the world” can be taken in at least three senses.

First of all, Noah’s faith condemned the world by convicting it and proving its just deserving of divine judgment. His life and message was a sign of their doom. The contrast of his life with theirs revealed their alienation from God. The disobedience of the people and their rejection of God’s grace were grounds for their condemnation. Noah’s display of unflinching faith in God condemned them by leaving them no excuse for disbelief. If he could believe God beyond all uncertainty, they could also have done the same. But their disobedience meant their doom. There were no alternatives left.

Secondly, Noah’s faith condemned the world by proving them all wrong at the end. While they died in their self-invented prisons of false beliefs and practices, Noah and his family were saved by an obedient faith in God. To the world seeing is believing. To Noah believing was seeing. Therefore, being warned of things yet unseen, moved with fear, he built the ark, by which act of faith he condemned the world and himself became heir of the righteousness that is by faith. Noah’s faith won the battle of beliefs at the end. Indubitably, our world does rest on faith. Much of the information that one possesses and acts upon is a matter of belief. Much is assumed as a matter of faith in our relationships, our work, our dreams and our plans. One can’t shirk the reality of faith aside since very less can be done on the basis of knowledge acquired by pure reason or direct experience; but much is done on the basis of faith. However, the directing and acting out of faith cannot be an irresponsible business. One must not believe lazily or blindly as if he has no alternative but this before him, and one must not also believe in things out of social pressure or for maintaining the *status quo*. For no one is a slave of any other man’s opinion. We have seen how whole nations led into false thinking, prejudice, and war-justification during World-War II. Most Germans had fallen into believing Hitler’s lie about the purity and supremacy of the German race and the vileness of the Jews. The irresponsibility of belief in this matter was cataclysmic. Albert Einstein, himself a Jew writing to the heroes of the battle of the Warsaw ghetto, said:

The Germans as an entire people are responsible for these mass murders and must be punished as a people if there is justice in the world and if the consciousness of collective responsibility in the nations is not to perish from the earth entirely. Behind the Nazi party stands the German people, who elected Hitler after he had in his book and in his speeches made his shameful intentions clear beyond the possibility of misunderstanding. The Germans are the only people who have not made any serious attempt of counteraction leading to the protection of the innocently persecuted. When they are entirely defeated and begin to lament over their fate, we must not let ourselves be deceived again, but keep in mind that they deliberately used the humanity of others to make preparation for their last and most grievous crime against humanity.⁵⁵

Obviously, Einstein's mind could not absolve the German crime of (whether irresponsibly or willingly) submitting one's faith to undeniably inhumane beliefs and values. Speaking out of his experience of the shame and terror inherent in the War (one must remember that over 6 million Jews were killed in Hitler's concentration camps), he is not at all considerate to those who acted on such morally shocking terms. Those who did that stood condemned in the sight of Justice. Similarly, by an irresponsible and willing self-giving to the dictates of the flesh and rebellion against God, the world of Noah's time stood condemned before God. But Noah's submission to God in faith justified him.

Thirdly, Noah's faith condemned the world by showing that salvation is not by works but by faith. Only faith can seek the help of God. Pride, on the other hand, seeks to find its own way because it imagines of itself as being something while forgetting that it is nothing. The Bible says that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (Jas. 4:6). God can only give grace to the humble because only the humble seek God's grace. The proud cannot bow down before God but

FAITH EXPOSES

HUMAN FALSITY

Nullifies Excuses

HUMAN DEPRAVITY

Condemns Evil

HUMAN INSOLENCE

Demolishes Pride

⁵⁵ Albert Einstein, *Ideas and Opinions*, (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2002), pp. 212-213.

consider themselves as equal to God in the choice of what is good and evil. That was the deception into which Eve fell and is referred to as the condemnation of the devil (1Tim. 3:6); for the devil thinks that he is not anything less than God himself (Isa. 14:12-14). In this the devil and all who bear his mark of perdition stand condemned. But “blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 5:3). Thus, the world was condemned because of its insolent rejection of God and His grace. As a result of this, they were destroyed.

There were also other godly men in the days of Noah. Both Noah’s father and grandfather were living while the ark was being made. Noah’s father, Lamech, died when Noah was 595 years old, i.e. five years before the flood came and Methuselah died five years later, i.e. in the year that the flood came (see Gen. 5:25-31 & 7:6). We understand that Lamech was a godly man from his calling his son Noah, meaning rest, saying “This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD hath cursed” (Gen. 5:29) which signified beforehand that God would bring rest to the earth through Noah, a prophetical foresight revealing the foreknowledge and fore-plan of God. This prophetical legacy, definitely, was carried down in the family line from the time of Lamech’s grandfather, Enoch, who was a prophet and walked with God. It reveals the godly upbringing of the children. Lamech’s father, Methuselah, himself was a living prophecy to the people, his name carrying at least two different meanings with prophetical significance: “dying” and “darted” or “sent forth or sprout forth”,⁵⁶ prophetically signifying that “it will be sent out as a dart when he dies”. Accordingly, in the year that Methuselah died the flood was sent like a dart on the earth as fountains of the deep burst forth and the firmament cracked in to send down torrents of rain deluging the earth.⁵⁷ Thus, God had not

⁵⁶ It is composed of two words *math* (which comes from *mathay* meaning “when” or “long”) meaning “adult” (in plural form fig. “man”) and *shelach* meaning “putting off or dying” and “darting out or sent as a missile”.

⁵⁷ Some have suggested that the flood was the result of a meteoric fall in the ocean swelling it to deluge the earth. This eventually led to a kind of ice age and transformation of earth’s geological and climatic structure among many other

left man without a witness; the warning was already given as these men became living symbols of God's impending judgment on the world; but the world had no more ears to hear or eyes to see since sin covered their ears and eyes with deceptive sounds and visions; therefore, their condemnation was made obvious by the faith of Noah.

God knew beforehand who needed to be saved; He also knew who will not be saved (i.e. all the others who were disobedient). Therefore, in accordance to His foreknowledge He gave the design and the commandment to Noah: "I am surely going to destroy them and the earth. So make yourself an ark.... Everything on earth will perish. But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark – you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you" (Gen. 6:13, 14, 18, NIV). Even the exact dimensions and material of the ark were specified. In fact, God foreknew what He foretold. Similarly, regarding the people of the Anti-Christ during the Tribulation, God has foretold that they will not repent but will be destroyed by His wrath (Rev. 16:2, 8-21). The same is true also of the devil and his angels for whom there is no possibility of repentance. The Bible never asks to pray for the devil and his angels! God also forbade Jeremiah from praying for the rebellious house of Israel (Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11, 12). There was no chance or possibility of their repentance; therefore they were doomed beyond hope. Their unbelief had passed the extent of becoming irreversible and they had made themselves immune to God's grace by hardening their heart beyond repair. Obviously, here we find the instance of absolute unbelief or the maturation of unbelief. In the same manner that faith can grow to the position of becoming irreversible; unbelief can grow into irreparable demonic degeneration. Therefore, believers are warned several times in the New Testament to beware of false confidence created by the fleshly mind. For instance, Peter says, "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness" (2Pt. 3:17). Similarly, "This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which

went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck" (1Tim. 1:18-19). Also, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:12-13). All such warnings are given to believers to keep them from falling from their faith in God knowing that any concession to sin can be fatal to faith. The Scripture also commands the Church not to appoint newly converted Christians in leadership positions saying: "Not a novice lest, being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil" (1Tim. 3:6). To commission novices in leadership positions within the church, though they may be successful elsewhere, is like sending untrained and inexperienced soldiers to command forces at battle frontlines, which is a fault that lies not on the part of the soldiers but on the part of those who carelessly appoint them so in the Church of God. And whatever is done to the Church of Christ is more serious than any other business in the world for the Church is the body of Christ and to be careless with regard to it is a great offence (1Cor. 3:9, 10). Therefore, it is the sacred duty of each believer, not to be indifferent or ill-disposed towards each other but, to build each other up in the faith through the love of Christ and the ministration of the Word (Eph. 4:31-5:2; 1Thess. 5:11; 1Cor. 12:12-27; Jude 20, 21). But above all, the responsibility rests in the believer himself to hold on to faith and preserve the genuineness of his first love towards God. And the Scripture assures us that God "is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24). If one knows His Lord and both loves and is loved by Him, it is before Him that He stands or falls; and our Lord is faithful to lift us up if our hearts stay resolute on Him even in our weaknesses (Rom. 14:4; Jn. 21:16).

By faith Noah didn't just save himself but also his family as the Scripture says "By faith Noah, being warned of God... prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world." God didn't give this commission to other families as well, though He could do so and there could be many arks instead of just this one. But the fact of the ark is this that it was only constructed

because the rest of the world stood condemned. All humanity had corrupted its way before God (Gen. 6:12). But as head of his family, Noah was faithful in his house before God. He was faithful before God as a steward of the family of God and a priest unto Him. Therefore, he alone among all the men of the world got the honor of worshipping God at His altar in the new world (Gen. 8:20). Noah's family was his church and the ark symbolized God's grace and salvation by faith since all the world outside of it stood condemned when God's wrath fell on the earth. One can imagine what would have happened if Noah too disobeyed; for instance, no one would be here to write these words about him since humanity would have been wiped out. Human responsibility in his salvation is symbolized here in Noah's building the ark "to the saving of his house". Indubitably, Noah was saved by faith but this faith could only save because first it prepared the ark. This is what the Scripture refers to as working out one's "own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12) along with the assurance that it is God who works in us "both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (v. 13). In other words, God's work in us must be met by a faith that is active. God has no use of spiritually careless and slothful men who try to push on God all the blame for their failures. The Bible warns us saying "be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Heb. 6:12). Noah inherited the promise of a new world because he labored and did his best to finish the ark in accordance with all that God has said. He had no time for questions and doubts about the workability of the design given by God, he believed and acted on faith because He knew his God. Therefore, he inherited the promise of God and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Augustine believed that God had specified 120 years as the time of His forbearance before He would destroy the earth (see Gen. 6:3). He reasoned that since people continued to live longer ages even after the flood, "120 years" could not refer to the age-limit of individuals but to the time-period allocated to that generation that was to be destroyed. Augustine, *City of God*, XV. 24, p. 515. If this is true then Noah diligently worked to complete the ark in God's timing; which reveals the promptness and punctuality of Noah's faith.

BEYOND THE BILLOWS

By faith Noah “became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.” The Scripture attests that no one can be justified before God except by faith. It never says that one is *made* righteous by faith but that one is *declared* righteous or testified as being righteous, or becomes heir of righteousness by faith. The only place where the phrase “made righteous” is used is Romans 5:19; but even there the Greek word *kathistemi*, used for “made”, means “to designate”, “to appoint”, or “to ordain” indicating that it is not because of one’s worthiness or merit but by grace that one is designated as righteous. Noah is said to have become heir of the righteousness which is by faith which indicates that there are two kind of righteousness: one of works and one of faith; and the Scripture states that no man is justified in the eyes of God by the works of the Law. There is only one righteousness, which is the righteousness of Christ. Therefore, we understand that Noah inherited Christ’s righteousness by faith (Rom. 3:22; 10:4). The Bible tells us that Noah’s salvation through the ark symbolized the baptism (figuratively) that now saves us by the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1Pt. 3:20). In other words, Noah’s passing through the flood and becoming the father of a new world foreshadowed the gift of a New Creation (in which righteousness dwells, 2Pt. 3:13) that those who believe inherit through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is this righteousness that Noah was made heir of by faith.

Jesus said that “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Mt. 5:6) and, again, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Mt. 6:33). The word “righteousness” (Greek *dikaiosune*, δικαιοσύνη) means “the quality of being right and doing right” or the “state of being just”. It comes from the word *dike* meaning “justice”. Two other derivatives from *dike* are *dikaios* (just or righteous) and *dikaioo* (to justify). Thus, to be righteous means to be just, to be justified, or to be in conformity to justice. Plato defined justice as “the having and doing what is a man’s own, and belongs to him”⁵⁹ In other words, justice as a condition is a man’s possessing what is his own; as an act, justice is giving to a

⁵⁹ Plato, *The Republic and Other Works*, p. 124.

man what is his own (if it is taken away from him). In this sense we talk about economic justice, political justice, and social justice. In each of these cases, justice is the removal of inequalities among men and securing of their natural rights. This is sought to be by trying to purge unjust laws by resort to reason and to initiate activities that will restore and administer justice to the people. That false interpretations of a just law can create unjust laws is a fact that is well known. Jesus, for instance, rebuked the Pharisees and the Jews for making God's Law void through their traditions (Mt. 15:2-6). Thus, justice, reason, truth, righteousness, and God's Law are related.

The traditional way of looking at righteousness is to connect it to some law or principle of right and wrong; thus in Judaism righteousness means conformity to the Mosaic Law, in Hinduism righteousness means conformity to *dharma* (caste duty), and in Islam righteousness means conformity to the *Shari'ah* (God's Law revealed to Mohammed), whose primary tenet, however, is faith in Allah which is the essence of the Law. In all these, interpretation of Law is important in order to distinguish between what is just (righteous) and what is unjust (unrighteous). Justice is considered to be retribution or reward for conforming to or not conforming to the Law. Now this Law is above the laws and interpretations of men. For instance, our governments have hundreds of laws for citizens to abide by. When the laws of a nation conform to the standards of justice, they are considered to be just laws; but when not, they are considered to be unjust laws. In other words, the particular laws of a nation or people are also measured by the absolute Law of God. While in Hinduism and Buddhism justice is administered through the impersonal principle of *karma* (what one sows that he reaps), in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam ultimate retribution is always in the hands of God, who is considered to be the only wise and just ruler. The rulers of this earth are themselves accountable to God. In any of the cases, the retribution of unrighteousness (sin, iniquity, evil or wickedness) is severity. Even the ethical imperative of *ahimsa* (non-violence) in Jainism is not without *himsa* (violence) in terms of retribution. The reward of righteousness, on the other hand, is life in heaven or supreme bliss. However, it is commonly accepted that such perfection of righteousness is hard to achieve in this present

evil world (the Hindus call it *kalyuga* or the age of darkness and unrighteousness). Therefore, deliverance from sin and justice (just retribution) is sought in ways other than trying to establish one's own righteousness (which is impossible). The different ways include practices like trying to earn merit through religious rituals, devotion, or fulfillment of some particularly difficult mission that will earn a place in heaven. However, the Bible makes it clear that all such ways do not match the penalty demanded by the justice of God which is nothing less than eternal death.

Righteousness and Justice

Obviously, unrighteousness or sin is sin against the righteous Law of God or the justice of God. In the Bible, the word "righteousness" is often related to justice in the kingdom of God. Justice is administrative and retributive, in the sense of giving to someone what is properly his own or what he justly deserves. To the just, justice administers good and to the unjust, justice administers evil; if the scheme is not so then evil will be exalted as the Scripture says: "The wicked freely strut about when what is vile is honored among men" (Ps. 12:8, NIV) and the element of falsehood and lovelessness will freely gain ascendancy in God's world. But God as just God will not permit evil forever. At the time appointed all things will be brought to judgment. Some, however, misunderstand the Day of Judgment as the day when people will be condemned for their sins. But, the Scripture makes it very clear that the moment one breaks the Law of God one already stands condemned in the Law's eyes. And the Law of God is impartially rational and true. It never fails. It discerns the innermost things of the human heart (Heb. 4:12) and nothing is hid from the eyes of God. Thus, the predicament of man is not that he is guilty and will be condemned at the Judgment Seat of God but that he is already condemned because of his sins and the irrevocable sentence is already passed over him. This sentence is based on the righteous decree of God (Rom. 1:32, Amplified) which is irrevocable. The decree is that those who do such things are worthy of death, i.e. eternal separation from the life, presence, and goodness of God. And since the decree is irrevocable (for the laws of God are just and perfect), there is no way for a person to be saved from it.

One may say, however, that God being Sovereign has the authority to pardon the sin of those He will. And so all one needs to do is repent and believe in God and the merciful God will pardon him. But while it is true that God is merciful and that He is willing to pardon sins, yet it is also true that it will be false for Him to treat someone who has stolen something, for instance, as one who has not stolen anything. In other words, God cannot treat a sinner as a righteous (as justified). If God did that He would be false though He were merciful in judgment. Therefore, God's sovereignty to forgive sins cannot justify the wicked; the guilt still remains. However, if the guilt remains then the forgiveness (even if given) cannot be infinite. And if it is not infinite then it is not ultimately real; therefore, God cannot forgive sins infinitely without being false (overlooking of sins on earth doesn't mean absolution from eternal damnation) – and God cannot be false since He is infinitely perfect and positively all-sufficient. Therefore, the only way one can expect to escape the judgment of God is to be justified; but, obviously, a sinner cannot justify himself of his past sins even by repentance. However, God provided a way of escape for those who would come to Him in faith. That way of escape is Jesus Christ. Scripture tells us that He willingly offered Himself as the ransom for our sins (1Tim. 2:6) so as to redeem us from all sin and present us holy and blameless before God (Eph. 1:4). However, He can only present before God the one who comes to Him in faith and repentance accepting His sacrifice as that which purges his soul and conscience from all sin before God.

Jesus died and rose again from the dead for the justification of sinners. Those who die in their condemnation due to their unbelief in Christ will be resurrected at the end of time with a body fitted for eternal torment and separation from God. But those who come to God in repentance are made partakers of Christ who partook of death for our sins so that by the offering of His sinless body a glorious resurrection would be obtained for those who trust in Him. Anyone who is in Christ is justified by faith in Christ and there is no condemnation over him (Rom. 8:1). As in Adam all die (1Cor. 15:22), meaning that death has become part of our being adamic by nature; in Christ all those who believe shall be made alive in a glorious resurrection. The Scripture compares the death of a person

with the death of a seed. If one sows a mustard seed, for instance, one obtains a mustard plant. Similarly, when a sinner dies he is sown to a resurrection of condemnation which ends up in the eternal fire of hell. But when one who believes in the atoning death and resurrection of Christ dies, he is sown to a resurrection of glory which inherits the kingdom of God (1Cor. 15:42-58). Thus, death in one's sins is the door to hell while death in Christ is the door to eternal life. But how does one get into Christ from Adam? The answer is by being born again (Jn. 3:3) by faith in the eternal and imperishable Word of God (1Pt. 1:23-25) so that one is made heir of the promises of God's Word by faith. This doesn't mean that we stop bearing this adamic body. But that this body will be transformed at His coming into His likeness (Phil. 3:21) and the dead in Christ will be raised incorruptible (1Cor. 15:52).

Now to those who ask the question of how Christ's death could possess any "mysterious or miraculous virtue"⁶⁰ to redeem man from his sins (its power, presence, and penalty), the Scriptural answer is as follows (only two basic aspects of it are given here; there are many more):

1. *By the Authority and Power of the Word of God.* It is by the decree of God that one is condemned; likewise, it is by the decree of God that one is justified. The just decree of God has appointed Christ as the Judge and the merciful decree of God ordained Him as the Savior. In history, the decree of judgment met the decree of mercy in the willing and substitutive sacrifice of the Messiah for the sins of the world by which sinners are reconciled with God. God's Word appears to us in two forms: the Law and the Gospel. In the same manner that condemnation is by the Law (its pronouncement), justification is by the Gospel (its promises). The Gospel is the free gift of Christ's fulfillment of all that is required by the Law to justify us before God. Thus, as Adam's sin condemned us and made us inheritors of corruption, Christ's righteousness makes us heirs of incorruption by faith: both by legal pronouncement, for the unbelievers the pronouncement of condemnation and death, while for the believers the pronouncement of justification and life. (Jn.

⁶⁰ Mahatma Gandhi, *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1927), p. 126.

3:18; 8:11; Rom. 5:16-18). Apart from Christ, however, the sinner has no hope for there is no other way by which one can be saved. Therefore, justification is by faith in the Word of God.

2. *By the Condemnation of Sin in His Flesh (Rom. 8:3).* The just requirements of the Law that Christ fulfilled were not just His obedience to the Law of God but all requirements pertaining to the legal means of securing our salvation. Thus, for instance even His sacrificial body was prepared according to and by the Will of God (Heb. 10:5). This means that Christ was sinless and not under the condemnation of Adam since, first of all, He preceded Adam in existence and then also He as Son of God could not have sin. Adam's sin could only be imputed on those originating from him. But Christ being born of a virgin (possessing adamic body) by the power of the Spirit, thus taking the form of a human, was not under Adam's condemnation of flesh and spirit. Therefore, in His flesh sin was condemned in the sense that He, by His obedience to God in the flesh (i.e. as the Man), condemned⁶¹ sin as having no power over Him and those who come to Him by faith. Then through His sinless offering on the cross He condemned sin in His flesh (*destroyed the power of sin*) by demonstrating its incapacity to kill Him for it had no power over His sinless body (He was not killed but He offered Himself to God, Jn. 10:17, 18) nor over those of whom He was the substitutive price. Thus, He put an end to sin itself in His flesh (*removed the presence of sin*) by nailing it to the cross. The old race (adamic) is still under condemnation, being both mortal and sentenced to eternal punishment. However, He being ordained the sin-offering for us, sin was condemned and judged in His flesh so that we could be heirs of His righteousness (2Cor. 5:21). His condemnation of sin in the flesh constituted the fulfilling of all righteousness. Through this offering up by the eternal Spirit (Heb. 9:14), He eternally vanquished sin and death, thus also disannulling the penalty of eternal damnation by bearing away its infinite intensity and density by His death (*He paid off and cancelled the*

⁶¹ The word for "condemned", *katakrino*, may also be translated as "to depose", "to dethrone", "to overthrow", and "to render powerless".

penalty of sin; Col. 2:14). The New Man in the resurrection is the glorified Christ and the Law of God pronounces the blessing of life eternal and glory to all those who put their faith in Him so that His power works in us to finally save soul, spirit, and body because the Spirit of God's power operates by the Word of God by which the heavens and earth were made and which by mixture with our faith has the same power in us. The act of faith is the event that connects one with God's power available to us. The door was opened by Jesus; it is the act of faith that enters it. Therefore, justification is by faith alone and so is Christ's righteousness imputed to us.

Thus, the Bible provides a distinctive perspective of divine justice and mercy in which man is saved by faith is Christ. Evidently, Noah could not have known much about the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. But he had faith in God and, though he passed through the Flood, and eventually died, he became an heir of the righteousness that is by faith, so that in the final resurrection he will, in Christ Jesus, rise up to incorruption and immortality. This was so because Jesus, who came much later than Noah, paid the price for Noah as well and provided the basis for the new creation of God. Christ is truly "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8). Thus, God took Noah beyond the billows into the realities of the Resurrected Lord.

The faith of Noah teaches us several things: that faith in God is inseparable from the fear of God, that promptness of action is characteristic of faith, that faith stimulates diligence in work, that one's faith impacts the people it comes in contact with, especially one's family, that justification is by faith, and that by faith we inherit all that is secured to us in Christ. We also learn the truth that because of our faith we are also signs of God's warning to our generation so that the world is without excuse if it rejects the righteousness and salvation of God that is by faith alone. We are His witnesses.

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

1. Faith and fear of the Lord go together. One who approaches God by faith also does so with reverence in his heart.
2. One who believes also obeys.
3. A man of faith brings conviction to the lives of people.

CHAPTER SIX

Unquenchable Flame

“By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed to go out... not knowing whither he went.”

(Heb. 11:8)

Unquestioned obedience is what distinguishes Abraham's faith from anyone else's in the Bible. Never once has it been mentioned that he questioned or took a second thought about God's commandment. This doesn't mean that he never had difficult times in his life; but that through all this he never once doubted the sacredness of God's truth. He was unflinching in faith: his flame never dying.

The writer of Hebrews underscores three facets of Abraham's example of faith for our edification. They were his forsaking his old land, his dwelling in tents in the Promised Land, and his offering up of Isaac his only begotten son in obedience to God. Let's now turn to see what these events of his life reveal about the faith of God.

UNCONDITIONAL OBEDIENCE

The nativity of Abraham, Ur of Chaldees,⁶² represented the unconscionable dark chillness of his age. Steeped in idolatry, nature-worship, and the occult the city swelled with a populace that prided itself of the wealth and power that accumulated on it due to its advantageous location by the Euphrates. The massive ziggurat (a pyramidal temple), about 70 ft high and 210 by 145 ft at the base,⁶³ still visible at the site, was dedicated to the moon god Nanna. Each of its bricks were baked and inscribed with the names of the building kings or those who repaired the tower in later times,⁶⁴ probably meant to obtain merit from the moon god. The Bible tells us that at the time when God called Abraham, his father worshipped other

⁶² The site of its ruins, Tall al Muqayyar, now lies between present Baghdad, Iraq, and the head of the Persian Gulf. See “Ur”, *Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia* (PC Software; Microsoft Corporation, 1993-2001).

⁶³Cf. “Ur”, *Encarta Encyclopedia & Siegfried H. Horn, The Spade Confirms the Book* (Washington, D.C: Review & Herald, 1980), p. 71.

⁶⁴ Horn, *The Spade Confirms the Book*, p. 71.

gods, implying that they were idolaters (Josh. 24:2). This is not to mean that the worship of the true God was no longer in existence; for there is always a remnant in the salvation-history of God. Melchizedek, for instance, a contemporary of Abraham was called the priest of the Most High God (Gen. 14:18), to whom also Abraham gave his tithes. Yet, it was also quite true that traces of true worship had almost faded.

Abraham's call to inherit God's promise reveals God's incessant working out of His salvation plan. Jesus said "My Father works until now, and I work" (Jn. 5:17, MKJV). It reveals the depth of God's love and His care towards us. It'll only take eternity to understand the depth of the love of the Almighty and All-Sufficient Creator who gives all of His self to save sinners in conflict with His purposes. But while the world slumbers and sleeps or goes about doing its own earth-bound temporal works, God is incessantly at work, striving with men and women through His spirit, to bring them into His saving grace. The fact is that God is not in need of us: we are in need of Him. But He like a mother loves her baby and attends to her all the time, has attended to us in history. And when we were yet weak and incapable of saving ourselves, Christ died for us to ransom us from our sins (Rom. 5:6).

Conviction without Conflict

Abraham instantaneously responded to God's call by faith. The writer of Hebrews tells us that "he went out, not knowing where he went." There is no doubt that as soon as God's word came to Abraham, it was met by a heart prepared to receive the word like a good ground ready for the seed. The word met with a heart that anticipated and desired divine intervention since only such a heart could receive the revelation of God by faith (remember the parable of the Sower and the Seed, Mt. 13:3ff.). This tells us about the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual preparedness of faith before meeting with the word of God. Perhaps, Abraham was already a godly man despite his father's idolatry and knew God's voice so well that he recognized it immediately the moment he heard it and so responded to it in faith; or perhaps he had heard God for the first time and as soon as he heard Him, he was convicted that God was true. This second experience would be similar to Paul's (then Saul)

when, as on his way to persecute the Christians at Damascus, he was met by the vision of Jesus. Immediately, he was convicted and became convinced of the Lordship of Jesus Christ (whom he considered to be false just a few minutes ago). Paul's response at this moment of encounter is captured in the words "and he trembling and astonished said, Lord what wilt thou have me to do?" (Ac. 9:6). His reaction was a mixture of fear and astonishment and also a deep conviction from Jesus' words "I am Jesus whom you persecute. It is hard for you to kick against the goads" (Ac. 9:5, MKJV). There was obviously no rational investigation. Conviction was instantaneous. He himself confessed "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and having called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me... immediately I did not confer with flesh and blood" (Gal. 1:15-16, MKJV). He didn't have to go through some tests of truth or justification of beliefs before accepting God's revelation. The conviction was immediate and beyond doubt. The similar might have been the experience of Abraham. When he encountered God, faith sprung to meet God's truth without hesitation, though, as in Paul's case, ambivalent emotions such as a mixture of fear (numinous) and surprise (awe) might have accompanied the event. Yet, it also will be understandable that what is convincing to some might not be convincing to others. For instance, many might have seen the star that was seen by the wise men, but it was only they who were convinced of it as being the sign of the birth of the King of the Jews. To others it might have had no such significance. In any case, whether it was Abraham, Paul, or the wise men conviction is the product of a preparation of faith.

Now, one might be antagonistic to the truth, as in Paul's case before conversion, yet be prepared for it because of a seeking-faith that is honest at core. A seeking-faith is also restless since it discerns that something is either missing or wrong with the framework of beliefs it is holding to (its present world-view). The frustration may be experienced as some internal voidness or frustration with self or things around or inability to rationally connect with the world. This can be referred to as the pre-faith crisis or the crisis that is an aspect of faith in preparation (i.e. before seeking-faith finds perfect solace in truth). This state of faith may be figuratively referred to as a state of hunger and thirst for the truth; as a hungry and thirsty faith. We

have seen earlier that this kind of faith intuitively recognizes the truth the moment it perceives it as a child recognizes the milk he is hungry for. The only danger is that this seeking may meet with a false object (which may be even fatal). The Scriptural answer to this problem is that while in the case of humans there may be some fault, God never makes a mistake in this regard. The Scripture says: If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Lk. 11:11-13). And again, "The LORD is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you" (2Ch. 15:2). This is true since God is with us and all around us though we do not see Him and it is God who put this quest for Him in our hearts as the Word says: "He has made all nations of men of one blood to dwell on all the face of the earth, ordaining fore-appointed seasons and boundaries of their dwelling, to seek the Lord, if perhaps they might feel after Him and find Him, though indeed He is not far from each one of us. For in Him we live and move and have our being, as also certain of your own poets have said, For we are also His offspring" (Ac. 17:26-28, MKJV). Therefore, we are assured that God will not allow a falsehood to deceive His children but being close to us will Himself answer the heart that seeks Him with faith.

But the principle is clear. One only gets according to the desire of his faith. This is so because it is the desire of faith that determines the acceptance or rejection of truth. Therefore, the sinners who keep trying to suppress the truth of God by means of false religions and false actions are given up by God to evil (Rom. 1:28; 2Thess. 2:9-12). However, if there is anyone who truly seeks God, then he is known of Him as the Word says that the Lord knows them that are His (2Tim. 2:19) and that those that belong to Him (which is known by their honest craving for Him) recognize His voice (Jn. 10:27). Further, Jesus' parable of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin reveals the heart of God in seeking and saving them that are lost (Lk. 15:3-10; 19:10). Scripturally speaking then, one cannot doubt that God answers a faith that truly seeks Him and, obviously, when a heart of

faith encounters God in revelation the conviction is beyond any doubt.

A clear example of this seeking-faith that finds a convicting answer in divine revelation and promptly responds to it is found in the confessions of St. Augustine. Obviously, in his case the search was for a prolonged period of time. In Book Six of his *Confessions*, he writes:

Where wert Thou, ‘O My Hope from youth,’ and whither hadst Thou retired afar off? Hadst Thou not made me and distinguished me from the beasts of the earth, making me wiser than the fowls of the air? I was wandering about through the darkness and over slippery ways, seeking Thee outside myself, not finding the God of my heart. I had come to the depths of the sea. I lost confidence and was in despair of finding the truth.⁶⁵

Here, Augustine quotes the fact of man being created distinctly from animals in that he is imbued with rational faculties that enable him to obtain wisdom. Yet, he finds himself groping for God in various moods, cultures, and philosophies of the world; sometimes almost as a rebel of God yet, internally thirsty for his Maker until there came a time of crisis in his life when he doubted whether truth could be found. The problem was not that God was difficult to be found. But the days of his internal incoherence and frustration prolonged as his flesh kept preventing him from submitting himself completely in faith to God.⁶⁶ This went on until one day he was broken by his own doubts that stood between him and God’s will. While in such brokenness, he heard the voice of a child from a nearby house repeating over and over: ‘Take it, read it! Take it, read it!’ Immediately, he saw that the child’s voice was truly God’s commandment for him to open a book and read the first passage that he would find. So he hurried to the place where he had left the copy of Paul’s epistle to the Romans. Snatching it up, he opened and found the words in Romans 13:13-14 where the Word commands to walk as in the day not in revelry and drunkenness nor strife and jealousy, but to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and take no thought for

⁶⁵ *Confessions*, p. 129.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 218-224.

the lusts of the flesh. As soon as he read it, said Augustine, “all the darknesses of doubt were dispersed, as if by a light of peace flooding into my heart.”⁶⁷ Clearly, here conviction didn’t occur in a blank soul; it occurred in a soul that was already desperate for God. And obviously, the depth and intensity of the desperation determined the depth and intensity of the faith. One can’t fail to see here that when true conviction breaks the spirit of man, it touches him with a touch that ends all conflict inside. Therefore, God’s conviction evokes instant response. Abraham’s pre-faith experiences might or might not be as Paul’s or Augustine’s; however, when God’s word came to him, he was ready for it and accepted it without doubt or hesitation to the point that he didn’t even worry to ask God where he was meant to go. He was asked to go and that was all that faith needed to set it on the go. He went without doubt, without conflicts. Therefore, he is known as the father of all that have faith.

No Regrets, No Returns!

The divine commandment to Abraham came in the words “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you” (Gen. 12:1, NIV). The command came with the promise to make of him a great and blessed nation (Gen. 12:2-3). Abraham’s leaving did not signify a setting out on a trip to some foreign land in order to return back after sometime. It was a total departure from the land that was his own, from his father land. We know from the story of his life that he never returned to Ur of Chaldees again. When he left it once, he left it forever. Obviously, faith had brought in a total disconnection with all of his past that he left behind and Abraham never lost his faith.

This shows us the irreversible endurance of Abraham’s faith. His faith didn’t die because he didn’t let it slip away (Heb. 2:1) or let it grow weak through despair (Rom. 4:19) or wreck it through carnality and debilitating of conscience (1Tim. 1:19). This doesn’t mean that faith has no battles to win. The Scripture warns us not to be slothful but to be diligent in faith (Heb. 6:12; Judg. 18:9). Faith is not only to be guarded (Rev. 14:12) but also to be contended or fought for (Jude. 3); for it is only by fighting that one keeps one’s

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 225.

faith (2Tim. 4:7). The crisis of faith is a condition brought in by at least three faith-assassins: doubt, desire, and division.

1. Doubt. Doubt is helpful in the pre-faith condition by narrowing one's direction towards truth. That is to say, as doubt breaks all the false beliefs of the past one by one, a person is set in the direction of knowing the truth. In this sense, doubt is the precursor of faith. However, the moment faith is torched by truth "all the darknesses of doubt are dispersed", to use Augustine's expression. Doubt no longer has any place but its place is taken by the certainty, peace, and repose of faith. But even in the pre-faith condition, doubt cannot be segregated from seeking faith. Absolute doubt, in the sense that the possibility of truth is hung in perpetual doubt, can never come to truth for though it may see it face to face yet its doubt would prevent it from recognizing it as so. A mind committed to doubt can never submit in faith to truth. Therefore, absolute doubt is the greatest enemy of true faith.

There are chiefly seven Greek expressions that have been translated as "doubt" in the New Testament (KJV): *aporeo* (Jn. 13:22) meaning "to be perplexed"; *diaporeo* (Ac. 2:12; 10:17) meaning "to be thoroughly perplexed"; *meteorizo* (Lk. 12:29) meaning "to suspend as in mid-air"; *airo psuche* (Jn. 10:24) meaning "to keep the soul in suspension as in air"; *dialogismos* (Rom. 14:1; 1 Tim. 2:8) meaning "to reason" or "to argue"; *diakrino* (Mt. 21:21; Rom. 14:23) meaning "to judge differently" or "to discriminate"; and *distazo* (Mt. 14:31; 28:17) meaning "to waver". We can learn of the different ways in which doubt finds intrusion in one's life by looking at the usage of these words.

First, doubt appears in the form of perplexity or a loss of answer. This is indicated by the word *aporeo*. For instance, when Festus introduces Paul the prisoner to Agrippa the King, he says that the Jews were accusing Paul of some questions related to the Jewish religion; but since he was not well acquainted with this religion he was at a loss of answer or doubt (*aporeo*) how to judge him (Ac.

3 ENEMIES OF FAITH

DOUBT

Perplexity, Suspense, Argument, Double-Thinking, Variation, Wavering

DESIRE

Blinds Intellect
Binds Feelings
Blocks Conscience

DIVISION

Discord: Disagreeing
Dissension: Arguing
Disunion: Breaking Off

25:20). Obviously, the KJV would have done better to translate the word as “was perplexed” or “confounded” instead of “doubted”. But, still it is also true that perplexity is a condition of doubt since it contains the element of uncertainty. Festus lacked the confidence to judge Paul because he was confounded by the complexity of the problems that this trial presented to him. Therefore, he doubted about this matter of judging Paul. He was at a loss of answer. An intense form of this perplexity is indicated by the word *diaporeo* which means to be thoroughly (*dia*) perplexed. Perplexity indicates the condition of doubt as dilemma. It is the condition of neither knowing nor not knowing. It is the condition of being totally unable to understand something that seems to be significant and demanding an answer. Undeniably, faith does sometimes come across situations that confound and perplex it for a want of answer. There are things that can happen to us that we can’t explain by any rational means, for instance. Or, there can be a question put forth before faith which it immediately lacks an answer for, though it knows that there must be some answer to it. However, in many cases when complexity presents itself to us the temptation is to turn away to simpler things. This is a natural instinct. One tries to avoid unwanted complications, especially when they appear insoluble or even too demanding. One tends to walk around the problem and if incapable of, tries to turn on it. This is what happened with those disciples who turned away from Jesus because they felt He was becoming too complicated for them to get along with (Jn. 6:60, 66). But when Jesus turned to the twelve and asked them if they would also go away, Peter gave an answer which is a classic response to this dilemma of faith. He answered: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the Words of eternal life” (Jn. 6:68, MKJV). Peter understood the fact that there cannot be a turning away from something without a turning away to something else. There is no middle ground. Peter knew that this was an either/or situation. One could choose Christ and eternal life or choose to relinquish both. He made the wiser decision to stay with Christ despite the inability to understand several things. A more practically existential situation confronted Job, as seen earlier. It was practically existential because the absurdity or perplexity of the suffering that he went through was thoroughly personal and its answer too evading (Job 7). Yet, he knew that there could be no

turning back from God. God was where his world came to an end. God was his no-returning point. Therefore, despite all the confoundedness of his suffering, Job held on to God in faith. And when his wife reprimanded him for holding on to his faith and told him to curse God and die instead of bearing the brunt of this absurd life, he answered her saying “You speak as one of the foolish ones speak. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?” (Job 2:10, MKJV). In other words, he in turn demanded from her an explanation for considering experience of evil as sufficient proof for turning away from God, even if such evil came from God. The finality of his faith in God could admit no doubt in God.

Another way in which doubt presents itself to us is suspense. The word comes from the Latin *suspensus* meaning “suspended” (akin to the Greek *meteorizo* and *airo psuche*, see above). The word indicates a condition of uncertainty fraught with intense curiosity, fear, or anxiety. Jesus told His disciples to stay away from such a condition (Lk. 12:29). Feelings of anxiety due to uncertainty may come to suspend our souls in doubt, but they should not be allowed to take hold of our lives; in other words, worry or anxiety should not become the condition of our lives. For such anxiety can easily lead to despair and a total shipwreck of faith. Similarly, unwanted curiosity can also be fatal to faith as seen in Eve’s case. For when the devil told her that the forbidden fruit was forbidden not because God sought her welfare but because He didn’t want her to be like Him, she immediately was convinced by his words (Gen. 3:4-6). Her curiosity regarding the forbidden fruit led her obey the devil’s lie. If God has forbidden us something, there is no danger greater than trying to conduct a scientific analysis of the forbidden thing. It is no surprise then why the Ephesian believers burnt all books of curious and magical arts⁶⁸ when they accepted the Lord (Ac. 19:19, KJV, Amplified). This is so because such curiosity can lead to a departure from faith. It is in this regard that the Mosaic Law commanded the

⁶⁸ The Greek *periergos* means “busy about trifles” indicating curiosity about unwanted things. The English word “occult” used for all such curious arts comes from the Latin *occultare* meaning “hidden” or “concealed” indicating the non-normalcy and unhealthiness of all such practices.

Israelites to destroy all images and things related to false belief to prevent their influence from corrupting the Israelites (Deut. 7:3-5). The images represent the symbols of false beliefs that stand against the faith of God. They are doors to disbelief. Therefore, sympathetic curiosity towards what is logically known to be wrong must be avoided. By “logically wrong” is meant those ideas that contradict the rational sense. For instance, in the story of Eve she turned towards the illogical belief that she could become like God (who is spiritual and infinite in wisdom) by eating a physical fruit and to the false idea that God was either jealous or afraid of her becoming like Him; as if she could become like Him and that God was afraid of His own creation. Similarly, the sympathy towards idols is absurd since an idol is not only a lifeless object but also symbolic of the vanity and falsehood of man. Therefore, one must guard oneself against any fear or excitement that is both irrational and godless.

The third kind of doubt is more intriguing. It appears in the form of reasoning or argumentation and is indicated by the word *dialogismos* meaning that form of argumentation that is controversial, unending, or false. It is in this sense that it is sometimes rendered as “imaginings” for its speculative nature is averse to any conclusion. In other words, *dialogismos* is doubt that expects no final answer. The imagination keeps going on finding no final ground to stand on; thus, hanging suspended (*meterorizo*) in curiosity and doubt all the time. I think our age understands this form of doubting better than any age before since, in our age, it is this kind of a scholar that is highly appreciated while the one who claims to have the answer is labeled as fundamentalist and narrow-minded. While in the past the wise man was he who had more answers and fewer questions, now he is one who has more questions and fewer answers. The modern wise man is like the Greek sophist who excelled in clever arguments but had no belief in absolute truth: his arguments generated more doubts than solutions. Our English word “sophistry” comes from this “sophist” and means “clever, misleading, and deceptive argument”. Obviously, this form of doubt or methodological skepticism is deliberate, proceeding from the bias that detests absolute solution to any problem. That is the reason why the Scripture warns several times to keep away from such love for show of cleverness and unhealthy disputing that signifies pride and

rebellion instead of humility (Phil. 2:14; Rom. 14:1; 1Tim. 2:8; cf. 1Tim. 6:3-5).

The next kind of doubt is *diakrino* meaning “to judge by analysis” or “to make a difference”. In relation to doubt it means “to make a different judgment”, “to think otherwise”, or “allow for some other possibility as well”. It is in this sense that it is used in Matthew 21:21 when Jesus tells His disciples “Truly I say to you, If you have faith and do not doubt (*me diakrithete*), you shall not only do this miracle of the fig tree, but also; if you shall say to this mountain, Be moved and be thrown into the sea; it shall be done.” (Mt. 21:21, MKJV). Similarly, James says: “let him ask in faith, doubting nothing (*meden diakrinomenos*). For he who doubts (*diakrinomenos*) is like a wave of the sea, driven by the wind and tossed” (Jas. 1:3, MKJV). Obviously, this kind of doubting is antithetical to faith since it introduces a rival element (a foreign particle) into one’s framework of belief. This kind of double-thinking is what leads to *distazo* or to the inability of holding on to faith, thus becoming unstable (as in Peter’s case when he walked on water and then started sinking due to fear); for the natural thoughts of the mind are set in conflict against the supernatural truths of God leading to a weakening of faith. The imbalance and instability caused by *diakrino* can be compared to an airplane (on flight) that loses its balance due to some technical failure to keep up with the laws of aerodynamics. That technical failure may be compared to *diakrino* when the plane wobbles between the law of aerodynamics and the law of gravity, for instance. The loss of balance is due to the plane’s inability to totally comply with the law of aerodynamics. The problem is solved if the airplane keeps to the purpose of its design, which is to be in air till it lands safely on the ground; the tragedy is when it fails to do that by giving in to anti-elements. Now, the anti-element may not be false in itself; for instance, the law of gravity is true as well as the fact that Peter could not naturally walk on water. However, in matters of faith the natural must submit to the supernatural and not vice versa. Even as the airplane is designed to fly in air, a man of faith is designed to sail on the winds of God’s promises. Abraham was a man of faith. He was not a man of a double-opinion or double-thinking. Therefore, there were no regrets about his obedience to God; neither was there any possibility of a

return for him. The Scripture testifies about him that “he staggered not (*ou diekritishe*) at the promise of God through unbelief (*apistia*); but was strong in faith, giving glory to God” (Rom. 4:20). *Apistia* is the antonym of *pistis* which is faith. Thus, Abraham didn’t allow an anti-faith element to make him double-think about and doubt the promises of God.

2. Desire. The second enemy of faith is false desire. Desire is the drive of the human will. Therefore, it is always seen as desire to do something or to get something in the sense that the mind is set on that particular thing, ultimately leading to action in that direction. In this sense, to will something is to desire that thing. In fact, the Greek word *thelo* is translated as both “to will” and “to desire” in the New Testament. However, in human experience, desire is often ambivalent as the Scripture says: “For the desires of the flesh are opposed to the [Holy] Spirit, and the [desires of the] Spirit are opposed to the flesh (godless human nature); for these are antagonistic to each other [continually withstanding and in conflict with each other], so that you are not free but are prevented from doing what you desire to do” (Gal. 5:17, Amplified). And again, “I fail to practice the good deeds I desire to do, but the evil deeds that I do not desire to do are what I am [ever] doing” (Rom. 7:19, Amplified). Obviously, there are two kinds of desires at work here and the either one gives in to the other in the struggle for letting out. One is lawless; the other, lawful. One is brutish; the other, rational. One is carnal; the other, spiritual. One is godly; the other, ungodly. One is sinful; the other, holy. While spiritual desire is rationally sound, emotionally stable, and conscientiously clear; lawless desire bypasses reason, corrupts the feelings, stalls the conscience, and captivates the memory. That is the reason why the Scripture says, “Beloved, I implore you as aliens and strangers and exiles [in this world] to abstain from the sensual urges (the evil desires, the passions of the flesh, your lower nature) that wage war against the soul” (1Pt. 2:11, Amplified).

The fatal blow of desire is its luring the mind to justify wickedness. This is when faith is jettisoned and deception sneaks in. Sometimes even a whole nation can fall prey to the rule of passion by rebelling against truth. In his *Republic* Plato quotes Damon as saying “when modes of music change, the fundamental laws of the

State always change with them.”⁶⁹ We may not totally agree with Plato’s view against musical innovations; but when one sees the unrestrained wand of passion displaying gestures of rebellion in any art-form, one cannot but suspect that values are being redefined. The Word warns, “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Isa. 5:20).

The simplicity of Abraham despite the blessings of God on his life is evident from his contentment to live in tents all the days of his life (Heb. 11:9). It is also evident from his contentment with what only God gave to him and not desiring even a shoe lace by any other means. He made a covenant with God to never be blessed except he was blessed by God; therefore, when the king of Sodom came to him offering the spoils of war, he replied: “I have lifted up my hand and sworn to the Lord, God Most High, the Possessor and Maker of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a shoelace or anything that is yours, lest you should say, I have made Abram rich” (Gen. 14:22, 23, Amplified). Abraham knew God’s promise of blessing to him and wanted nothing more than that. That is faith.

The Scripture warns us that they who are minded to be rich fall into temptation and many foolish, irrational, and hurtful desires that lead to perdition (1Tim. 6:9). One example of it is Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the prophet, who ran after Naaman the Syrian and, in the name of his master, took from him stuff that his master had refused; but when Elisha questioned him where he had gone, he replied “nowhere”. This man had seen even the dead raised through Elisha’s prayer and still found the courage to lie to him. His conscience and memory were smeared by lust and greed to the extent that he believed that everything was okay despite his sinful act (2Kgs. 5:20-26). Similarly, David when captured by the lust for Bathsheba forgot all bonds of wickedness. He not only committed adultery with her (breaking God’s covenant) but also got her good husband ruthlessly murdered. This man, who once was so zealous for God in faith that he single-handedly defeated the giant Goliath, had now fallen prey to a woman’s beauty (2Sam.11). One doesn’t know what irrational justification his mind was framing in order to

⁶⁹ Plato, *The Republic and Other Works*, p. 113.

not lose the opportunity and companionship of lust. But it broke the heart of God. The same was also true of Judas Iscariot who sold the Lord for 30 pieces of silver after being with Him for three and half years. It is foolishness to think that one's environment or conditions of living determine the strength of one's faith. Adam and Eve were in a perfectly sinless environment before they fell into sin. Lucifer was an angel of God. Judas, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the chief priests saw Jesus in person and yet went against Him. Many of us often imagine that if we were as close as the disciples were to Jesus much of our spiritual struggle would be solved. Many desire at least one vision of Christ in this life. But one must understand that all such spiritual and sacred experiences put together can easily be suspended by the onslaught of lust; for lust hijacks all emotion, intelligence, memory, and conscience. Therefore, one must guard himself of all ugly desire that, though seemingly fulfilling, is disastrous in the end.

3. Division. By division is meant the lack of real spiritual fellowship and communion with God. This causes alienation and distancing from the knowledge of God. As a result, faith suffers loss. Division manifests itself in three forms: discord, dissension, and disunion.

a. *Discord.* Discord means a lack of agreement or harmony between two persons. While discord between men may be expressed or unexpressed, discord between man and God needs no expression since God knows what's in the human heart. Discord between God and man is a matter of perspective and will-towards-something rather than ratio-empirical disagreement (as in matters of scientific or philosophical research). This is so because the relationship is not of the nature of this spatio-temporal pluralistic world where things stand divided from each other in space and time. God is unlike the world and its objects; He is not far from us, as the Scripture says, and we live and move and have our being in Him (Ac. 17:27, 28), which means His presence is more real than the world around us. Therefore, discord or concord between God and man is unlike discord and concord between worldly things, in the sense that it is not primarily a matter of ratio-empirical dispute. It is a matter of perspective, a matter of faith. Discord with God is not justifiable since it is not based on rational judgments but on the choice of will

propelled by desire. Therefore, the Word says that God has given up those who, falling to evil desire and reprobate thinking, disgusted themselves by abominable practices (Rom. 1:21-28). The Bible says that the carnal mind is unsubmissive to the Law of God (Rom. 8:7). This lack of submission is not in the sense that it has some logical reasons for not submitting to God but in the sense that the intentions and actions of the carnal mind are opposite to the Law of God. The perspective-shift (from carnal to spiritual or vice versa) can be in a split of a second or gradual. It may be a reaction to a temptation or a moral decline through negligence. Whatever way, the perspective-shift is indicative of a shift from faith to practical disbelief.

b. *Dissension*. Dissension is the violent and aggressive form of discord in which the disagreement is vociferously expressed. While in the former case, discordant questions may not be expressed for fear of causing obstacle to the faith of others (see Ps. 73:15), in this case all shame and fear is set aside. The Bible uses different words to describe dissension; some of them are: murmuring, complaining, scoffing, mocking, blaspheming, strife of words, evil talking, perverse disputing, railing, speaking in hypocrisy, ungodly talking, etc (Phil. 2:14; Ps. 1:1; 1Tim. 4:2; 6:4, 5; 2Tim. 3:2; Jude 15, 16). Jesus warned His disciples that on the Day of Judgment men will have to give an account of every idle word that they speak (Mt. 12:36). Dissension comes from a heart of unbelief. It was because of such vehement and vexing ungodly talks that the Israelites were destroyed in the wilderness (1Cor. 10:10). All their opposition was based on their lusts and whims and not on any logic. God had shown such wonders to them that He had never shown before. He foiled the skill of the Egyptian magicians, broke the strength of pharaoh and his forces, tore the Red Sea into two, and walked before them as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. I do not know of any nation on earth as a whole who had seen so much of God and yet disbelieved Him so much. They broke God's commands whenever they liked and spoke whatever came to their mouth against God's servants. Jude tells us that God destroyed them because of their unbelief (Jude 5).

c. *Disunion*. Disunion refers to a break-away from faith in God, thus from God. This is the severing of relationship with God. This disunion is the final end of a life of ungodly speech and action. It is

the moral failure to hold on to faith and a good conscience and is characterized by a blasphemous lifestyle (1Tim. 1:18-20). This is what the Scripture also calls as a departure from faith by giving in to seducing spirits and the doctrines of devils (1Tim. 4:1). The doctrine of the devil is nothing but ultimate rebellion against God and His truth. The life without faith in God is a life of falsehood. It is a life of self-opposition (2Tim. 2:25). Therefore, says the psalmist, the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous (Ps. 1:5). The sinners who walk after ungodly counsel and associate to scoff at the revelation of God will not be justified (cp. Ps. 1:1). But the just shall live by faith (Rom. 1:17).

The Scripture warns believers against this alienation from God's truth. It is the sin that brings a division between God and man (Isa. 59:2). The sin of willful commitment to unbelief and disunion with God is unpardonable. It leads to death (1Jn. 5:16). The book of Hebrews tells us that there is no chance of renewal for those who, after knowing the irrefutable truth of God, fall away from the faith (Heb. 6:4-6); for it is evident in their case that their falling away from faith is self-willed and not because of weakness in understanding the truth. The truth was crystal clear to them. Similarly, Peter says that the final condition of those who turn away from the knowledge of Christ after having escaped the pollutions of the world is worse than the first; for, he says, it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than to have known it and then willingly turn away from it (2Pt. 2:20, 21). Such a life becomes blasphemous, godless, and a willful opposing of the ways of God.

Now, there are three chief ways in which faith can be kept; they are: confession, conduct, and communion. Let's look briefly at each one of them and see how Abraham not only kept his faith but grew stronger in it by following these and by refusing false doubt, ungodly desire, and any sin-induced division. We do not say here that Abraham never made mistakes but despite of all his weaknesses and shortcomings he was justified before God because of his holding on to the Lord. He loved the Lord and no matter what he had to go through, he didn't stagger in faith, since he knew that he could never

leave the Lord that he knew as the true and gracious God. For him there were no regrets and no turnings back.

1. Confession. Confession is the verbal establishment of inward belief (Rom. 10:10). It is the public testimony of private faith. And when confession is heartily and confidently done, then the internal and the external dimensions of human experience are reinforced in the integrity of faith. Abraham's confession of faith is captured in his single statement to the king of Sodom. He said: "I have lifted up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoe latchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich" (Gen. 14:42, 43). He confessed here that it is God alone who could have the absolute right of claim over all of Abraham's blessings, that his sustenance came from God, and that everything of him was God's and what was his was what God had committed to him. This shows his total trust in God and no side-glances at anything else. His mind was steadily focused on God and His promises. Of course, this doesn't mean that Abraham never sought any clarification from God. But

whenever he did that it was in humility of spirit and never in the haughtiness of pride characteristic of the dissenters. For instance, when God told him that He would bless him with a seed that shall become a nation, the Bible says that Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him as righteousness (Gen. 15:6). But when God tells him in the next verse that he was going to inherit Palestine, he asked for a way to know how that would happen. He knew that he was living in tents here and that there were little chances that this tent-living could be given up soon since the land belonged to the different tribes that inhabited it. But God showed him how he would do it giving assurance of it by means of a covenant. He told him that his seed would go to a foreign land whom they shall serve but then return back in the fourth generation to take this land into their hands by punishing the inhabitants of it. Accordingly, the next two generations of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob too lived in tents, went to

3 FRIENDS OF FAITH

CONFESsION

Verbal Establishment of Faith

CONDUCT

Factual Establishment of Faith

COMMUNION

Relational Establishment of Faith

Egypt and returned after about 400 years to take the Promised Land. Obviously, there were things that Abraham didn't understand but he confessed what he knew and trusted God for things too difficult for his understanding. And God was faithful to reveal His counsel to Abraham. Similarly, spiritual facts like being saved, being forgiven of all sins, being heirs of Christ's righteousness and the Kingdom to come must be confessed again and again in faith or else the devil will gain place by introducing guilt-feelings, doubts, and fears in the heart of the believer. One must acknowledge one's sinfulness and inability to save oneself, submit to God, and then resist the devil.

Confession brings the mind in subjection to the line of verbal reasoning manifest in the assertion of faith-statements. It awakens the consciousness to the truths of God. It enlightens the memory with the optimism of divine assurance. It is the active choice of the believer to set his mind on the things of God. It is this reason why Christ confessed God's Word and His purposes by quoting the Scripture when the devil came to tempt Him. He told him that "Man shall not live by bread alone" when the tempter challenged His divine sonship. He need not prove anything to either the devil or to anyone. By confessing the Scripture, Jesus declared to the devil God's counsel of sending Christ as man to this earth; and that this material world is not an end in itself – bread is not the ultimate thing: to turn stones into bread would mean to look at any object of nature with selfish intentions.

2. Conduct. Conduct is the factual establishment of faith. It is the behavior of faith. It is the phenomena of active faith. It is not mere asserting but the confirming of faith through action. It is the conformity of life with faith. It is the finalizing of the meaningfulness of belief. One can only live out that which one considers to be livable or meaningful and significant. Therefore, conduct is the establishment of faith in fact and in deed. There is not one instance in the Scripture where it is mentioned that Abraham disobeyed God. Whenever God told him anything to do, he immediately did it. We have seen his obedience of faith in regard to leaving Ur and also, at a latter point, sacrificing his only begotten son. His obedience is also seen in the case of sending Hagar away. When Sara told Abraham to send Hagar, his concubine away, we are told that this thing was very grievous in his eyes because of Ishmael,

his son by Hagar (Gen. 21:11). However, when God told him to quit feeling grievous about this and do as Sara had said since God was in control of everything and was going to bless Sara's son, Abraham rose up early in the morning, packed up things for Hagar and Ishmael and sent them away, without grieving, having been assured of the promise of God regarding the maid and her son. Abraham's emotions were controlled and directed not by any worldly wisdom but by his faith in the truth and power of God. He knew His God very well and, therefore, he followed Him wholeheartedly. Of course, his half-truth about his wife (Gen. 12:13; 20:2) due to fear evinces his use of cleverness in escaping difficult situations instead of trusting totally in God's ability to protect him. Similarly, his giving heed to Sara in cohabiting with Hagar, according to their custom, in order to have a child was a hasty and humanly rationalized way (Gen. 16). But one must remember that, in the former case, Sara was truly his half-sister and Abraham's tactic was something to prevent a possible enemy's foil act. It was not motivated out of a failure of faith at all. Anyone who has read about the tactics that believers of the underground churches employed in order to prevent the enemy's success in sin should not be hasty to indict them as failing in faith as if God could not protect them. In fact, they did so because of their unflinching faith in God Whom they could at no cost deny. Obviously, no one generally stretches these things to such an extremity to say, for instance that footballers should give up their play tactics or army men should give up their war stratagems in order to walk according to faith. I am here only trying to prevent hasty and unjust accusation against Abraham; not to justify Abraham's actions. What for me is important about Abraham is that God never accused him of what most people accuse him. Even if he failed, God would not have accused him since God knew Abraham's faith and it is before his Master that he falls or rises, and even if he falls God is able to raise him (Rom. 14:4). One will also remember that Christ never condemned Peter for denying Him thrice but understood the love that was in the depth of his heart. Similarly, in taking Hagar as wife, this might have been so because God's revelation of giving a son through Sara, specifically, is revealed only in Genesis 17. Further, Abraham's listening to his wife to give her as she desired should not be interpreted as wavering from

faith; for, even in doing so there was no indication of his disbelief in God about anything; there could not be. In addition, God never treated Abraham's child through Hagar as the product of a mistake, but instead blessed him as well. At any cost, none of these things were indicative of any weakening of Abraham's faith; the truth being that in every instance of God's specific commandment, Abraham was obedient without question, hesitation, or second-thought.

3. Communion. Communion is the relational establishment of faith; the personalizing of faith in relationship. One can only be one with someone one is at one with; and one can only be one with someone who is like that one, i.e. basically personal then other points of aesthetic and ethical agreement or harmony: therefore, communion is the personal relationship with God through the harmony of faith. Communion with God is the living out of the I-Thou relationship with Him. It is the establishment of the fact of faith as relationality and not just as subjectivity. Communion can never be one-sided. Communion can never be fantastical. Therefore, communion is the objective establishment of faith in a real divine relationship. When Abraham was 95 years old, God spoke to him saying "I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect" (Gen. 17:1). The command to walk before God was the command to be in perpetual agreement and fellowship with Him. The command to be perfect was the command to be wholeheartedly committed to God in this relationship. The Bible tells us that as soon as Abraham heard this voice (he was still called Abram till this point), he fell with his face prostrate on the ground. He didn't even speak a word. Anyone who reads the life of Abraham can see him not only as a man of few words but also as a man of diligence and great reverence for God. His communion with God was so close that the Scripture calls him "the friend of God" (Jas. 2:23; 2Ch. 20:7); yet, it was only with reverence in heart that Abraham ever approached God. This can also be seen in the case when he intercedes for Sodom. His intercession is not like one demanding something from God by right though he was God's friend. For instance, when he enquires the second time he says: "Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, who am but dust and ashes" (Gen. 18:27) and goes on to make his petition. Remember

God's confession about Abraham just before this session; God said "Shall I hide from Abraham that which I do... for I have known him" (Gen. 18:17-19, MKJV). God could trust Abraham as a friend could trust his friend. That was the depth of communion between them because God knew the genuineness of Abraham's faith and his absolute and indefatigable holding on to the truth of God. Abraham knew God and glorified God as God; therefore, he was blessed by God.

Thus, we see that through faith and obedience to God Abraham inherited the promises of God. The anti-faith elements of doubt, sinful desire, and division could not find place in his heart full of trust and faith in God. Abraham's words, actions, and feelings were all tuned up with the will of God. Therefore, he only kept moving onward and never turning back in his walk before God. While the world groped in the darkness of unbelief and falsehood around him, Abraham recognized God's call over his life and followed Him not knowing where he was going.

GLORIOUS VISION

The writer of Hebrews says about Abraham that "by faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:9, 10).

One very important teaching of the Scripture is that we are all pilgrims and strangers in this world, implying that this world is not the final end of God's creation of man. While this perspective of Abraham and the patriarchs is not stated in the Old Testament, the writer of Hebrews tells us that their humble dwelling in tents in the land promised to them signified that they looked for the promise of not an earthly city but the city of God. Abraham did reach the Promised Land but never possessed it. In fact, when Sara died, Abraham requested of the inhabitants to sell him a place for her burial, which signified that he didn't even have a place of his own to bury his wife. He lived as an alien in that land as he himself confessed "I am a stranger and a sojourner with you" (Gen. 23:4). That is the reason he lived in tents like a nomad. Our father of faith never had a building of his own on this earth though he was

definitely rich in other possessions. He neither built a house or a city for himself and the Bible never says that he sought one for his own. He and the patriarchs lived as strangers and pilgrims in this world (Heb. 11:13), which meant that their journey, though begun in this world was not to end here.

Eternal Dimension of Faith

Faith assuredly has an eternal dimension to it. Eternality is a necessary characteristic of faith. This is so because faith is infinitely unsatiated in itself, by itself, and for itself. Therefore, it finds ultimate satisfaction in a categorical plunge into the infinite depths of God Himself. Obviously, faith in temporal objects has only temporal significance. However, the faith of God has eternal significance. All faith related to this world is nullified by death. Beyond the grave faith in temporal objects has no value. In fact, temporality gains its distinctive meaning from death itself. Temporality is both *timeliness* and *towards-deathness*. In other words, to be conditioned by time is to be temporal. At the same time, one experiences death by only being in time; therefore, mortality (*deathness*) is only characteristic of temporal beings. But faith being trans-temporal is undaunted at death. Faith is joy and peace of eternal quality since it nullifies the carelessness of youth and the anxiety of ageing. The believing youth, therefore, is careful in his walk while the old look forward with anticipation. This also means that true faith is unattached to the world of temporal possessions, positions, and pleasures.

1. Faith Transcends Temporality. As long as one is constricted by space-time desires and purposes, faith can't progress. The vision of faith is transcendent. It looks beyond this world to the eternal realities of God. This is what characterizes a walk by faith that is not by sight (2Cor. 5:7). By sight is meant "with reference to appearances"; i.e. to the objects and events of this temporal world. By faith is meant "with reference to God's Word"; i.e. to eternal facts secured by the promises of God. Faith obstructs temporal finalizations since it attaches itself to God's ultimate purposes. The final vision of faith determines the believer's lifestyle. The three kinds of vision, one must notice, are final, personal, and temporal. One sees all such vision with the eyes of faith alone. Final vision

refers to the vision that God has regarding creation. Abraham saw the city of God as God's final architecture for believers; and he saw it with the eyes of faith. Personal vision is the personal calling of each believer in relation to this final vision of God. It is the high and heavenly calling for which God calls His people. For instance, Paul's calling was to be a witness of Christ's mysteries to the gentiles which included suffering for His name's sake. His satisfactory fulfillment of that calling enabled him to declare that he had fought a good fight of faith (Gal. 1:16; Eph. 3:6-8; Ac. 9:15, 16; 2Tim. 4:7). All such visions have eternal consequences. Temporal vision, on the other hand, is simply setting up worldly goals and objectives that may not relate necessarily to God's calling and Kingdom. These may be goals defined by companies or institutions or a person's desire to get something like a house or a bicycle. Though through faith in God such temporal objects can be obtained, their validity or invalidity is determined by their connection to God's final will and His calling over our lives. In human eyes, success is defined in terms of human praise. And natural men naturally praise physically appealing things or things that cater to their wishful thinking of spirituality or hedonism. But God's praise is of truth; truth established by His Word. And it is by faith that one connects to this divine truth and vision despite of the direction of the waves of human thinking.

2. Faith Anticipates Immortality. The apprehension and vicarious experience of death stagnates any faith and hope that is temporally grounded. Those who trust on material things and the things of this world are, therefore, soon distraught. But the faith of God looks beyond death. It is by this faith that Job declared: "after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes – I, and not another" (Job 19: 26-27, NIV). Similarly, David says "my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay" (Ps. 16:9-10). The text obviously, has three meanings. Firstly, it means that God will protect David from all danger of death and will not abandon him to destruction: this has a temporal dimension since David had to ultimately die. The second meaning is as expounded by Peter in Acts 2:31 that David prophesied about the resurrection of

Jesus Christ: this has a Christo-prophetic dimension as Christ is the basis of resurrection to life. The final meaning relates to David's resurrection himself. The word for "decay" is *shachath* which means pit, grave, destruction or extermination. David prophesies about himself that God will not let temporality consume him forever; for though we live in space-time we are not made to terminate with it. The divine assurance of resurrection and eternal life is the antidote to the fear of death. Faith frees the believer from the chains of this-worldly ambitions, from the anxiety of failure, of ageing, of weakness, and the dread of death.

3. Faith Instills Responsibility. A man of faith lives with eternity in mind. His life is, therefore, characterized by accountability and soberness. An unbeliever who doesn't take the future into consideration dallies away time in careless indulgences. He is unmindful of the danger lying ahead. He cannot see ahead because his eyes are set on the ground. The Epicurean slogan "Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die" is true of them, for they truly do die in their sins. For as they live in their pleasures, they also die in their pleasures. Therefore, the careless souls will not be justified on the Day of Judgment. The unbeliever doesn't have the light of God and lives in perpetual darkness until the day when death sucks him into the pit of everlasting darkness. But we are not of the darkness but of the light. And "since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet" (1Thess. 5:8-9, NIV). The combination of faith and love as a breastplate talks of the knowledge of faith as reflective and active in the accountability and care of love. Life is care only for faith that works through love. A carnal man cares for neither his soul nor for the souls of others. He looks at lust or passion as an end in itself and wallows in sin despite knowing of its evil. But faith and care (love) together with hope (knowledge with anticipation) helps in spiritual warfare. While the hope of salvation protects the mind from the false and destructive ideas of the world, faith and love protect the heart from deadly desires and fatal feelings. It is not enough to know with the mind. A drunkard knows that alcohol is destructive and still submerges himself in it because in him mental knowledge is not combined with active faith and care. If he truly loved himself, the drunkard would do anything

to save himself. He would become sober and responsible. He cannot hope since he cannot act in faith and love. Therefore, as the mind and the heart must agree for agreeable action, hope and caring faith must agree towards the salvation of the soul.

One who lives with an eternal perspective will never allow the world to bind him either to the past or the present. One can't look forward by looking backward. The past may have been wrong, but it is just the past. To be chained to the past memories, failures, or pains is to lose sight of the great eternal. Similarly, to be chained to the present worries and worldly demands is to lose sight of God's eternal plan and purposes. While the past can disparage a man and the present debilitate him, faith lifts one above his feelings and circumstances to act, without hesitation, in accordance with the eternal purposes of God. Only a man of faith and eternal vision is, therefore, truly responsible.

Divine Architect

Hebrews tells us that Abraham looked for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:10). The same testimony is also given of the patriarchs that they lived as pilgrims and strangers looking for a city prepared for them by God, a heavenly one (Heb. 11:13-16). The three active descriptors of God are important for our understanding of the vision of faith.

1. God is Builder of the City. The word for “builder” is *technites* (τεχνίτης) which means “artificer”, “builder”, “craftsman”, and “architect”. God is the one who drew the layout and built this City. This is not a garden like that of Eden but is a city that has a plan and structure unrivalled by and infinitely superior to all earthly cities built by men. One may wonder if God had intended this to be the vision of the patriarchs then why He should have led them into the land of Canaan after all to dwell in tents. The answer is that God did purpose to give Canaan to them as He did but that was just an intermediate plan related to the coming of the Messiah. The final vision is, of course, of this great city. To live in tents meant to have no permanent dwelling place on this earth; no permanent city, no permanent home. The city that God has built for His royal people is their only final abode. The city is built after God's own heart, desire, and design. It is false of believers to imagine wishfully about this

city. One who submits to God by faith also submits to His plan and design since he trusts in God's wisdom and purposes. Commitment along the way in trust on God is also commitment towards the end of faith, the reward that God gives to the faithful.

2. God is Maker of the City. The city has foundations, meaning it is permanent and not like the tents they lived in. The word for "maker" is *demiourgos* (δημιουργός) which was used by the philosophers Xenophanes and Plato for the Creator-God. The term is only used once, that is here, in the New Testament. Since *Demiourgos* is someone who works (*ergon*) for the people (*demos*), He is also seen as not just the maker of the physical city but also as the God who structured the city as a permanent dwelling place for His people. He is the governor of the City and the people for whom He has built the City. As *Demiourgos* or Demiurge, He is the sovereign Owner and Master of the City. However, the Bible makes it clear that by faith in Christ one becomes heir of God's Kingdom and citizen of this City of God. But the unbelievers will find no entrance into it (Rev. 22:15). Since God has built this City for His people, He is not ashamed to be called their God (Heb. 11:16).

3. God has prepared this City for the Believers. The word *hetoimazo* (έτοιμάζω) in verse 16 denotes making full preparations or making ready. It signifies the completeness and perfection of God's work. Anyone who clearly realizes this will not lack anything in faith since he is assured of the fact that God's plan doesn't lack anything. Further, there is a futurist dimension to it. That is the reason why it is apprehended by faith and not by sight. It is yet to appear but when it appears it will overshadow all things. Finally, this speaks of God's total concern and love for His people. He prepares for them a dwelling place since He cares for them.

It is this vision of an eternal City that defines the lifestyle of the believer. The believer is not threatened by worldly forces nor confused by worldly wisdom because he has had a vision of God's established City in heaven.

UNQUESTIONING OBEDIENCE

When God asked Abraham to sacrifice his only begotten son, Isaac, he did that without argument or doubts. Isaac embodied and

symbolized God's promise to Abraham to make him a nation. By asking for Isaac, God was asking Abraham to lay at God's altar his whole sense of leaving his own nation and following God's vision to this point. In fact, many would consider this to be senseless. But Abraham was differently minded; for him sense and sensibility were related to the character of God and not the insufficient reasoning of man. Would anyone be willing to give away the ministry and labor he has invested so much of time and energy into? But Abraham didn't think of his life or the gifts as belonging to himself. Therefore, he was so beloved of God. He knew God and His promises as never failing and reasoned that though God had asked for Isaac's sacrifice He "was able to raise him up, even from the dead" (Heb. 11:19, NKJV), which God did, figuratively speaking, as the Scripture says.

The difficulty with the divine demand of Isaac's sacrifice is that it seems heathenish and barbaric. God's demand of the promised son, however, has deeper implications. In fact, one must understand that God is vehemently against human sacrifice, since it constitutes murder (cp. 2Kgs. 16:3; 17:31); but, at the end it was through the sacrifice of the Man Jesus that salvation was procured for mankind. This was so because Jesus was not sacrificed by men but He was appointed as a sacrifice for our sins by God and, He being the image and expression of God, gave Himself as an eternal sacrifice for our sins. While animal sacrifice possessed symbolic significance of Jesus' death, the heathen practice of human sacrifice was totally error-driven for it considered the sacrifice of other humans as possessing propitiatory or meritorious virtue, which it didn't. Secondly, animals could be rightly purchased and owned but freedom is a human's birthright and, therefore, even a father has no right to sacrifice his son. But since God is Sovereign owner of all things, He can do as He wills. And so He appointed His own Son as the sacrifice for the sins of the world. Similarly, now He asks Abraham to sacrifice Isaac; obviously, not because Abraham was owner of Isaac – he wasn't – but because God was the one who gave Isaac to Abraham and He had the right to demand him back. Job too had the same conception when he confessed in response to the death of his children saying "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21, NKJV). However, we are dealing with very delicate issues here. Any false

step can bring disaster. We know of false cults that authorized child and human sacrifice in the name of religious authority. It is heinous to even think of God ever requiring such rituals and we consider such cults as inhumane and demonic. Obviously, God's demand of Isaac's sacrifice constitutes a far greater problematic of faith to the Christian than to someone from a superstitious heathen background.

We understand that Abraham was experienced enough to recognize God's voice when it came to him. We also understand that Abraham lived in an age when the Bible didn't exist in the final form as we have it now. Therefore, any experience could not be measured by the final standard of the written Word. Consequently, Abraham's faith rested in God's self-revelation of Himself through visions or personal appearances. But Abraham knew God's voice and didn't hesitate to obey it. I believe an understanding of Abraham's response in faith to God's demand helps us understand how to deal with the problematic of paradoxical faith. In fact, we observe that Abraham sacrificed Isaac by faith, which means that He believed God and His promises and the fact that Isaac could not die since God could not be falsified.

1. Abraham's Obedience Was Historically Grounded. The divine command was not without a precursor. The same God who was true to His promise in granting Him a son had now asked for that son. Abraham's obedience was clothed with a rich experience of God's faithfulness throughout his life. It was God who called him, God who blessed him, God who led him, and God who gave him Isaac. He and his wife Sarah knew God's faithfulness in a very realistic and personal way. It is testified about Sarah that she considered God as true to His word and that she by faith received strength to conceive and bear the child Isaac (Heb. 11:11). God kept His promise without failure. Therefore, God could not be false to Abraham nor to Himself. Abraham knew that Isaac could not die because God's promise of making of him a nation could not be false and was not false. If God had asked for Isaac's sacrifice, there must have been some reason behind it. Evidently, that reason was not Isaac's annihilation or sacrificial consumption in death but something that related to God's good purposes.

2. Abraham's Obedience Was Personal. Abraham's obedience was to a personal command. God's personal commands must be

distinguished from His general commands. For instance, Jesus asked the rich young man to sell his possessions and follow Him. This doesn't mean that every rich man should sell his possessions though all are called to follow Jesus. God has often told several men and women to do certain things that were specifically for them to do and not for others. Such commands are situational. For instance, Jesus commanded Peter to walk on water. This doesn't mean that Peter was given the gift to always walk on water and every believer should be a water-walker as if not walking on water demonstrated a lack of faith. In some situations God's specific or situational workings may appear contradictory to His will but it is not so. For instance, God signified to the wise men of Christ's birth through a star. Obviously, God doesn't endorse astrology here but in that situation, He chose to reveal to them this event through a way that appealed to their rationality. Does this mean that God's acts are arbitrary, capricious, and indeterminate? Of course, not; the fact is that God speaks to each individual in a way that is so personal between God and that person that it might sometimes be not understandable to others. God judges man in accordance to his response to this personal work of God in his life. The principle behind the personal command must be, however, clearly understood. For instance, in the wise men's case, the principle was that God evidential communication comes in contextually true ways. The star that they saw was a truly divine sign and not something imagined by men. God gave it. It was not based on human studies of already existent stars. Similarly, the principle behind the command to sell all possessions is that God's command to love cannot be subsistent with a love for mammon. In Abraham's case, God was testing him (it was a test as the Scriptures testify) to see if he really revered God after his son was already born, after a significant part of the vision was completed, and after Abraham's line of descendancy was assured through Isaac. Did Abraham consider God more important than his progeny or a whole nation that was contained in Isaac in seed form? Abraham's obedience revealed the answer to the end that God testified saying "now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me" (Gen. 22:12, NKJV). It was a personal test that Abraham passed.

3. Abraham's Obedience Was Optimistic. Abraham anticipated an optimistic result of obedience. He knew that the God who produced Isaac from the weakness of Abraham's loins was able to also raise him from the dead (Heb. 11:19). It was with this assurance that he told his two servants "Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you" (Gen. 22:5, NKJV). He knew that he would not return without the lad. That was the confidence of his faith. Accordingly, he told his son on the way that "God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering" (Gen. 22:8) when his son observed that they had everything except the sacrificial animal. His faith was optimistic. He saw beyond this sacrificial event, the historical future of a nation sprung up from Isaac. Therefore, Abraham was not grieved to obey God. I feel he actually was enthusiastic to see what God had in all this asking him to do this thing.

4. Abraham's Obedience Was Rational. The writer of Hebrews says that Abraham accounted (*logizomai*) or reasoned within himself that God was able to raise Isaac up from the dead. His obedience was not based on superstitious belief but on the logical calculation of what God had done and what He was able to do. He was assured of both the faithfulness and power of God. It is like a motor-bike stunt man who calculates speed, time, and other factors before performing the final stunt. The stunt man's faith in these things may go wrong, but faith in God's righteousness and power cannot be deficient. If one chooses to believe in God one must believe Him fully or not at all. There is nothing like a partial belief in God. All partial belief is equivalent to unbelief or not knowing God as He is. Thus, Abraham's obedience was a calculated and well reasoned obedience.

5. The Demand Was Unique and Unrepeatable. God's demand for Isaac's sacrifice was both unprecedeted and final in the history of man. God never before demanded such sacrifice and has never ever demanded it again. It was uniquely Abrahamic because of the nature of the promise, the symbolic figure of Isaac, the nature of Abrahamic faith, and the confirmation of a future history that was unique in itself through the promise of God as God said after this "By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son – blessing I

will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice" (Gen. 22: 16-18, NKJV). The sacrifice of Isaac, consequentially, possessed a symbolic meaning of the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Christ. Isaac's return as if from the dead was the sowing of the seed for a greater harvest of many nations being blessed in him. Similarly, Jesus who was born in this genealogical line died as wheat falling to the ground to bring about a new race of God's sons from different nations of the earth. In Isaac was the Messianic line sanctified through this Abrahamic act of consecration through faith. God never wanted Isaac's sacrifice. He only wanted Abraham's consecration. Since the Messianic line was consecrated in Isaac, his sacrifice was also final with regard to its nature, i.e. as confirmation or finalization of the promised Messianic line in him. Years later, Christ would be sacrificed as a propitiation for the sins of the world by a voluntary and substitutive sacrifice. While Isaac's sacrifice was final in the sense of the consecration of the Messianic line; Christ's sacrifice was final with regard to the propitiation of sins and the consecration of a new race of believers for God. Therefore, we are sanctified by faith in Christ (Acts 26:18).

Thus, we understand that Abraham's obedience was governed by several factors. First of all, he had a historical experience of God and therefore understood this divine demand from such historical perspective. Secondly, we saw that the demand was personal and specially related to him and his situation. Thirdly, Abraham's faith was optimistically assured by His understanding of the nature and character of God and so he was bold in obedience. Fourthly, we saw that Abraham's obedience was rational as he calculated the possibilities of God and the factuality of God's faithfulness and righteousness regarding Isaac on the basis of faith. Finally, we saw that this particular demand of God was uniquely Abrahamic only. It is both unprecedented and never demanded again. Therefore, this sacrifice is sealed with Abraham. That means that it is impossible for God to demand anything like that again from anyone. But Abraham's act of obedience sets an example of unquestioning obedience before us. Indubitably, today we live in the age of the

Bible. God's written Word is in our midst, and the truths of which it is witness are the objects of our belief. If anyone claims that he has had a special revelation of God to which he is being obedient while being openly disobedient to the already revealed and written Word of God, then we know that such person's claims are all false. For there can be no personal and particular demands on anyone who has not yet learnt to conform to the general and universal demands of God's Word. All liars, hypocrites, seducers, and cheats who falsely claim divine authority while themselves being twisters of Scriptures are faithless and unbelieving in spirit. One must beware of them. But if someone is obedient to God's Word then he will also know in a rationally significant manner what God wills him to do in particular times.

To summarize the chapter, Abraham's faith teaches us to be confident, instant, optimistic, rational, and unquestioning in our obedience to God. The enemies of faith are doubt, evil desire, and division. Faith is established verbally by confession, practically by conduct, and objectively by communion. It has an eternal dimension being infinitely dissatisfied with the things of the world: consequently, it finds repose only in the infinite depths of God's love and faithfulness. This kind of faith raises one from the fringes of temporal satisfaction, instills in one responsibility, and frees one from the fear of the future. It also rests assuredly in and conforms to the designs and plans of God the Divine Architect. Finally, faith is not mere blind belief but is historically grounded, personally oriented, rationally established, and existentially confident. Therefore, true faith inherits the promises of God as Abraham did.

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

1. One only gets according to his faith.
2. Doubt, lust, and pride are enemies of faith.
3. A man of faith confesses God's Word and lives according to it.
4. A man of faith is not earthly minded; he looks to the glorious vision of God's heaven.

CHAPTER SEVEN

“By faith he forsook Egypt...seeing him who is invisible.” (Heb. 11: 27).

Great Salvation

The story of Moses from Nile to the Jordan is covered by four books of the Pentateuch, *viz.* Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Though Moses himself never entered the Promised Land, yet he led the children of Israel to its borders. The Scripture testified about him that he was “very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth” (Num. 12:3, NKJV). Obviously, Moses did not have a domineering or imposing personality, as some think it vital for leadership. Neither was he very articulate as he himself confessed to God saying “I am not eloquent...but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue” (Ex. 4:10). Nevertheless, God chose him to be the leader of the Exodus. It was by faith in God that he defied the overwhelming power of Egyptian magic and military supremacy; yet, he prevailed because God sent him and God was with him.

FAITH LEAVES A LEGACY

The writer says that “by faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment” (Heb. 11:23). One can observe here that often it is the faith of others that adds into our lives. In this case, it was the faith of Moses' parents that prompted them to hide him from the king and by this they invested into Moses the results of their faith. This is the blessing of a godly family: its children are blessed because they enjoy the blessings of their parents' faith. Similarly, the congregation who has a pastor rich in faith partakes of the blessings of his faith. Certainly, our actions are not without their ramifications. The ramifications of faith are blessings from generation to generation but the ramifications of unbelief are disastrous. What we believe and do impacts not just our lives but also the lives of the generations to come. Therefore, a study of history must not be disentangled from a study of culture and

philosophy (in other words, of people's belief-systems). Ideas shape history through religion and culture. This means that what one believes in has far-reaching consequences. In Moses' case, it not only meant the channeling of divine providence through his parents' faith-action but also the provision of a leader for the creation of Israel's history as a nation. Though it was Moses who led the people out of Egypt and gave them the law and a religious-system, it was his parents that first contributed to this history-making through their faith in God regarding Moses. Obviously, they also left a legacy of faith for him as can be seen later on by his refusal to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter and taking up the path of suffering by faith. Faith is influence and faith is legacy because faith doesn't keep silent: it acts out. The writer of Hebrews underscores three elements of the faith of Moses' parents: sight, courage, and action.

Faith as Aesthetic

The writer says that Moses' parents saw him as being a beautiful baby. The word for "beautiful" is *asteios* (ἀστεῖος) in the Greek and is used only twice in the New Testament (Acts 7:20; Heb. 11:23): both of the times to describe Moses. The word "aesthetics", meaning the philosophical science of beauty, comes from this word. The Jews believed that Moses was a very handsome person; so handsome, said Josephus the historian, that people would stop to gaze at him when he passed by. However, it is understandable that it was not as much the physical beauty of the child as much as it was the spiritual fairness of their conscience that prompted his parents from taking the risk of hiding him. Inevitably, Pharaoh's soldiers might also see Moses but would not spare him; not because they could not appreciate his physical beauty but because their vision differed from the vision of Moses' parents. Their way of looking was just different. The Egyptians looked on the children of Israel with contempt. They didn't consider them to be a special people at all. And therefore, prejudice prevented any optimistic vision in them. That is the reason why they made slaves of them. But, Moses was Amram's and Jochebed's own son: he was special to them; and he was beautiful not just because of his being good-looking but because he was God's gift to them. Most importantly, both of them realized

that the child, being himself dependent on them as a babe, could only be saved by their risk of faith. This is the either/or condition of faith. Either give up or stand against the tide. Parents and leaders need to realize this fact that often the future of their children or followers depends on whether they are or not faithful in fulfilling to the end the care entrusted to them. Their faithfulness is their mark of faith or the ability to see beyond all natural limits. Moses' parents obviously saw Moses as not just their son but as a son of the Hebrews, as belonging to the flock of God. He was not just born to them but to the people of Israel, the people who worshipped Jehovah.

It is important for parents, teachers, pastors, and leaders to reconsider how we look at each other. The Bible shows us the aesthetic way of looking at each other. Aesthetic, not in the sense of physical beauty which fades with time, but in the sense of looking at each other as being special and uniquely designed by God for His glory. This aesthetic view is not just about how we look at others but also about how we look at ourselves. Obviously, when the Bible says that we must love our neighbor as ourselves, it also implies that we must first understand what it really means to love ourselves. For if we miss that we also miss the second, namely loving our neighbor or as the Good Samaritan's story tells us, being a loving neighbor to someone. Self-despise is a sinful as despising our neighbor. For if it is false to judge others wrongly then it is also false to judge oneself wrongly. Extending from here, we need to realize that despising anyone else is nothing but practice of a false faith. This immediately tells us that faith is not just related to what we think of God, but also what we think of ourselves and our fellowmen in relation to ourselves and God. Obviously, knowledge of God or relationship with God is not one-dimensional. Even as the Jewish mystic, Martin Buber, saw relationship as compounded in an I-It or I-Thou perspective, we understand that any understanding of God through faith also involves a second dimension; that is knowledge of ourselves in relation to Him. Therefore, the command to love one's neighbor as oneself is not separable from the command to love God; and the Word asserts that someone who fails to love his fellowmen cannot be considered to be loving God (1Jn. 4:20). Faith, therefore, has double implications. What we believe about God is also related

to what we believe about ourselves and how we treat ourselves with respect to God and the world around us. It is in this sense that I think the biblical aesthetic view-point of valuing each other's life, rights, and person becomes pivotal for authentic Christian living.

Faith as Courageous

The Bible tells us that Moses' parents were not afraid of the commandment of Pharaoh (Heb. 11:23). The Greek word for "afraid" used here is *phobeo* (φοβέω) which means to be intensely terrified, so much that the fear grips at the whole being almost to the point of a paralysis. The word "phobia" comes from the same root word. Pharaoh had commanded the people saying, "Every son who is born you shall cast into the river, and every daughter you shall save alive" (Ex. 1:22, NKJV). The interesting thing is that eventually Moses was anyway cast into the river but, obviously, not to be killed! The fact to be observed here is that it was because of faith that Moses' parents were not terrified of a human decree. No doubt, the Egyptians considered the Pharaoh to be a God but he was still a human. This doesn't mean that believers are not required to submit to earthly authorities; for the Scripture clearly states "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God." Further, "whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves" (Rom. 13:1-2). Notice the Bible doesn't tell us to be afraid of the authorities but to be afraid of God. In fact, it asks "Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same" (Rom. 13: 3). This also means that if rulers begin to be a terror to evil works (i.e. that they make evil laws and ask the citizens to comply), then citizens need not comply with them since the authority to make such evil laws doesn't come from God. One doesn't need to be afraid of such commandments. Obviously, it is the faith that relates to the goodness of God that prompts submission to anything that is good and true. Earthly fears cannot take hold of the man who only fears God.

True faith is not terrorized by this-worldly threats. Jesus said, "fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in

hell" (Mt. 10:28). It would have been ruthless if the parents of Moses would have let their son cast into the river just so that their lives would be protected. Even parental instinct doesn't permit this. We know of instances from the animal kingdom when the mother would do anything in order to protect its little ones. It is only false religion and evil ideology that sacrifices the children for personal advantages. That was the case with the religion of Molech in which children were burnt alive so that their god would be appeased. Falsehood eventually corrupts nature and turns humans in unnatural beings (Rom. 1:26). However, truth guards the heart against all evil by placing one's self in the right perspective in relation to God and man. Therefore, true faith drives away all false fears and self-centered apprehensions. It guards the conscience against evil and purifies the heart with right affections. It was the faith of God that gave Amram and Jochebed the courage to do right despite of the pervasion of evil.

True faith is not terrified by the world. When King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon challenged the God of heaven and threatened to burn Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego with fire if they didn't bow to his golden image, they replied "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up" (Daniel 3:16-18, NKJV). Obviously, their faith was not utilitarianism here. It is not like believing in that which seemingly is profitable. That was the error of Eve. She thought the tree of knowledge was profitable and believed the words of Satan. But profit or loss has nothing to do with the faith that has grasped reality. Therefore, the three Hebrew children fearlessly answered that whether they were saved or it cost them their life they would not bow to false worship. It is this kind of faith that is resolutely committed to truth that pleases God; for it is written that God is seeking for those who worship Him in Spirit and truth.

Faith as Active

Faith is not just courageous in its stand and confession but is also bold to take the initial step of action that pleases God. There is no doubt about faith being an antonym of fear. Peter walked by faith on water because he was bold enough to take his first step on it; but as soon as fear gripped his soul, he began to sink. Thus, faith, courage, and action are closely connected. The Scripture tells us that “by faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents” (Heb. 11:23, NKJV). If his parents had just sat silent without doing anything, the story would have been quite different. But they acted out in faith. Evidently, as seen, faith without works is dead. The faith of Moses’ parents was active.

Importantly, here, it says that it was by faith that Moses’ parents hid him for three months. This tells us that acts of avoiding evil are not acts of unbelief but of faith when they are sagaciously done. There are many such instances in the Bible. For instance, Jesus tells His disciple to leave any city which as a whole refuses Christ’s message and starts persecuting the messengers (Lk. 9: 5; cp. Acts 13: 51). Jesus Himself avoided unnecessary falling into the enemy’s traps (Mt. 4: 12; Lk. 4: 30). Similarly, Paul escaped once through a basket when people were in wait for him, was prevented by the disciples from getting beaten by a crazy mob, and took measures to inform the authority of a group of Jewish fanatics who had vowed to not eat till they killed him (Acts 9: 25; 19: 30; 23: 17-21). He also used his Roman citizenship as a privilege to prevent unnecessary torture, to appeal to the highest court of justice, i.e. to Caesar, and to get people understand that they cannot just by-pass laws to persecute the minority (Ac. 16: 35-40; 22: 25; 25: 11). Thus, it is obvious that the Bible desires Christians to be rational in their conduct of life, seeing that the Bible does allow the avoidance of persecution if it is possible.

This also extends to avoiding any circumstance that is conducive to evil. Jesus taught His disciples to pray “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Mt. 6:13) and Paul tells us under divine inspiration to “abstain from all appearance of evil” (1Thess. 5:22). In other words, if we know that there are certain things that can lead us to evil, we must avoid them. For instance, a man who has quit smoking should avoid places and people that

could be a temptation to him to relapse into that habit. Such avoidance is not sign of weakness but of the strength of faith. For instance, I strongly believe that if I touch a live electric wire with bare hands, I'm going to get a shock and so I'll avoid touching it. I'll avoid doing things that can harm me because I know and believe the truth regarding those things. Similarly, I brush my teeth to avoid tooth decay, keep myself and my surroundings clean to be healthy, and take proper food to have strength. However, if God told me directly not to do these things I would not do them. But as long as such specific commands do not come, it is my duty to abide by the principles that keep this universe functioning properly. Faith doesn't overestimate things unnecessarily. It abides by the truth. If God had directly told Amram and Jochebed that they need not hide their child then they would have done it, but where such a thing was not revealed they had to do what was wisest to do. Any act of unnecessary presumption could only prove fatal to both the child and the parents.

Moses' parents saw with the eyes of faith, were bold in their stand, and were prompt to act by faith since they knew and believed that which was pleasing in God's sight. One may say that any parent would have done that; what has that to do with faith? The fact, as has been seen, is that faith does play a major role in determining whether the child needed to be saved or not, whether there was any value to his life above theirs. More importantly, it rejected the Egyptian claim of the Pharaoh as divine. Since Pharaoh was not God and had not given life to anyone, he had no right to get innocent babies killed. By their disobedience to his evil commandment they rejected the falsehood of an evil law. But they were also wise and not presumptuous in their action; and their faith was justly rewarded too.

FAITH DESPISES EARTHLY GLORIES

The writer goes on to say that "by faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward" (Heb. 11:24-26). It is interesting here

that the writer refers to Moses' commitment as a commitment to Christ. One might ask how that could be since Christ was hidden in the Old Testament. The answer is that though Christ was not yet revealed in the New Testament manner, it was He who was with the Old Testament saints in their spiritual journey. It is in this sense that Paul says about the Israelites that while in the wilderness "they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ" (1Cor. 10: 4). In other words, they were partakers of Christ. Similarly, Peter says that unto the prophets "the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow" (1Pt. 1:11). Certainly, since salvation is only found in Christ, the Old Testament saints were saved and redeemed by the blood of Jesus the Lamb of God who was spiritually slain from the foundation of the world.

This commitment to Christ is important because it demonstrates one's association with and belongedness to the Kingdom of Christ. Therefore, Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He rejected the rights, privileges, and honor promised by the world for the true glory and destination that God had for him. In doing this, he chose to suffer affliction with the people of God. Obviously, this information is not from the Old Testament but from Jewish tradition. However, the inspired Word inscribes here as a truth about this warrior of faith. Moses renounced the royal palace and chose to identify himself with the despised and rejected people of God. Paul testifies about Onesiphorus that he was not ashamed of his imprisonment but sought him and did whatever he could to serve him (2Tim. 1:16, 17). Jesus said that whoever confesses Him before men on earth, him will He confess before the Father in heaven (Mt. 10: 32). Jesus Himself left the riches and privileges of heaven in order to fulfill the will of His Father in heaven (Phil. 2: 6-8); and when the devil came to Him with the temptation of easy bread, worldly reputation, and earthly riches He rejected them all. He endured the shame of the cross for the joy set before Him (Heb. 12:2). One who has seen the riches of Christ will have no respect for the pleasures of this world.

There are three things mentioned here about the reasons that guided Moses' step of faith: the fact that these pleasures were

temporary, that the riches of Christ were greater, and that faith had its recompense.

Finality is the Measure

Moses knew that the pleasures of sin did have an end: they were not perpetual. This is the ability of faith to look beyond the entanglement of the present. Those who lack faith get entangled in the lusts of the flesh which gravitates so much inwardly that all distant perspective is lost. The present desire is so much magnified that it obscures everything else. But faith has an eagle's perspective. It sees beyond the present. It looks at the end of all things. There are two ways in which Moses' final perspective can be understood.

1. The pleasures lacked an intrinsic reality. They were pleasures only superficially but, intrinsically speaking, they were void of the essence of true pleasure. These were pleasures of sin; firstly, because they thrived over the affliction of the Israelites; secondly, because they were part of the process that enslaved the people of God. In other words, they were devoid of the reality of God. They not only lacked divine approval but also divine glory. In fact, they were disconnected from the goodness with which God created this world. They fell short of the end or purpose of all things intended by God. Therefore, these pleasures were also false and empty in themselves. They could never give any ultimate or enduring satisfaction and therefore were not worth having at all.

2. The pleasures lacked a prospective reality. They were only for a season: momentary, ephemeral, transitory. At the end they only left a bigger vacuum. The intoxication of the lust now over, bitterness engulfs the soul demanding to fall back into a greater intoxication than this. The void only intensifies at the end. The pleasure of sin can never give final satisfaction; it only drags one deeper into the snare of wickedness and evil invention. It plunges one into a thicker darkness each time befogging the mind against all reality of God. Therefore, a man of sinful pleasures can neither appreciate nor desire the things of God.

Thus, Moses refused to partake of the pleasures of Egypt that thrived over the affliction of God's people. Instead of going for such pleasures he chose to share with the afflictions of his people.

Value Relates to Person, to Christ

Moses esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. One might wonder how reproaches could be considered to be richer. But if you love someone then you would surely understand that suffering for that loved one is far better possession than everything contrarily put together. No doubt, true value is personal and not materialistic. That is the reason why the love of money is the root of all evil (1Tim. 6:10). It replaces the value of person with the value of money (the Judas Iscariotic syndrome) and in doing that it also replaces the love of neighbor with the love of self-satisfaction. Therefore, it is the root of all evil. Moses knew what really had value in his life: it was his relationship with Christ. The treasures of Egypt would not remain his forever – death parts one with everything on earth – but his relationship with Christ would be permanent. But even more truly, true value rests in love on which relationships are founded. There cannot be any true love between persons and things, since it is not reciprocal. Love of things (like money) is nothing but self-centeredness. Love has to be between persons. But is there anyone more than God who could be the true object of our love? Obviously, not; therefore, Moses esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.

Faith Has Its Reward

Finally, it says that Moses was looking to the reward. He had the end in his mind all the time. It would be a ludicrous scene to see a runner running without his eyes focused on the goal. Moses knew where to look at when making even the smallest decisions of his life. He had a rightly fixed perspective. He looked at the reward. The Greek word for “reward” is *misthapodosia* (μισθαποδοσία) meaning “due wages” or “recompense”. 1 Peter 1:10 tells us that the end of our faith is the salvation of our souls. Jesus said “what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mk. 8: 36). The fact is that whatever the world can give will only remain with the world, but when one gives himself to Christ, he becomes an heir of God’s eternal, incorruptible, and indestructible inheritance. But an eternal inheritance is not just what Moses was looking at. He was looking at Christ the Finality of all things. This was also what

Paul looked at when he said, “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ” (Phil. 3:8). For the man of God there is no greater reward than Christ Himself. For the Church of Jesus Christ, the Bride of the Lamb, there is no greater reward than her Bridegroom coming back to her. Looking back at Abraham, one might not be surprised about his unconditional obedience if one saw that he took God for what He said, that He would be his “exceeding great reward” (Gen. 15:1). Moses walked in this faith and got his reward.

FAITH HAS NO TURNING BACK

The Scripture tells us that “by faith he [Moses] forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible” (Heb. 11:27). This Moses who once was even hesitant to return back to Pharaoh and the children of Israel is now bold in faith and fearless of the wrath of the king. He knew the fact that the wrath of man does not work out the righteousness of God (Jas. 1:20). It was good for nothing before God; it was absurd before Him. God despises the wrath of man; He casts down the proud but exalts the humble. Moses knew his God. The friend of a lion is not afraid of a fox. But God is the Sovereign Lord of all things. Therefore, the man of faith, as Moses was, had no respect for the wrath of Pharaoh. Moses had seen God and talked to Him face to face; he had seen the invisible one (Ex. 4); so what could man’s fear mean to him anymore?

Faith Keeps Moving On

Moses forsook Egypt. Obviously, this is not talking about the first time he fled from Pharaoh’s wrath. If the writer of Hebrews is following the chronological order (because it mentions the Passover in the next verse), then this most probably refers to Exodus 10: 28-29:

Then Pharaoh said to him, “Get away from me! Take heed to yourself and see my face no more! For in the day you see my face you shall die!” So Moses said, “You have spoken well, I will never see your face again.”

It may be right to say that this was the point where Moses abandoned Egypt never to return again. Pharaoh never got to see his face again, not because Moses was terrified by his threat but because God took over the final scene as if with a storm. Moses need not plead before Pharaoh anymore. His job before him was done. What he needed now was to move onward.

The man who walks by the Spirit continues in the Spirit. But there can be times when someone starts in the Spirit and ends up in the flesh (Gal.3:3). Whether it be in our conversations with others, services, or daily work, it is important to remember that we are not debtors to the flesh to live according to its passions (Rom. 8:12) since we are already dead to it and are now slaves of a new Master who is Christ. Therefore, it's important to be sensitive to the promptings of the Spirit and walk accordingly for when one refuses to stop where the Spirit tells to stop and keeps continuing in the flesh (this may even happen with preachers) then disaster is sure to strike; for where the fruit of the Spirit is absent, the works of the flesh come into play. Moses was sensitive to the Spirit of God; and, therefore, knew that it was time to prepare for the final things and abandon Egypt.

Faith Endures

Moses endured or was steadfast, as the Greek also indicates, meaning he was unshaken in his walk and determination. There are at least two things that can be understood about this:

1. Moses had self-control. He didn't respond to Pharaoh's threatening according to his flesh, but chose to listen to God and follow His instructions instead. In fact, Pharaoh's anger had nothing to disturb Moses since he was actually working for God. His concentration on God's word and submission to Him enabled him to not only be fearless in such situations but to keep his reactions under control.

2. Moses stood strong. Moses was not weakened by the threatening of Pharaoh. The world does try to threaten God's people and thus weaken them as Sennacherib tried to do to Hezekiah (2Chr. 32:9-19). But Hezekiah turned to God and saw His salvation. Moses was steadfast in faith before God because He knew God was in control and the words of man could not prevail against the power of

God. Therefore, later on, when the Israelites are terrified by the sound and sight of Pharaoh's chariots rushing against them at the Red Sea, he proclaims aloud "Stand still and see the salvation of the LORD" (Ex. 14:13).

3. Moses had strong hope. Obviously, one can't endure without much hope. Moses' hope was not in human strength or wisdom. It was in God. The God who had been with him this far would not fail. He had not only encountered God in the burning bush but had also seen the wonders that His hands had worked before his enemies. Therefore, his hope could not be moved. He was steadfast in it and continued with no retreats.

Faith has its Eyes on God

Moses endured, as seeing Him who is invisible (i.e. God). It was not just a whim of imagination; for he did see God with the eyes of faith. The God who is invisible is not inapprehensible. He is closer to us than our breath and He desires that we should "feel after Him and find Him" (Acts 17:27). It is only eyes of faith that can see God for He is discerned spiritually and not physically. Moses saw God and endured. Unless one can see one can't endure. One needs to see where one stands in relation to some point of reference to even know where he'll go from there. God was Moses' point of reference and His commands were his directions.

1. Seeing means knowing. Moses knew his God because he had seen Him. This implies that God had shown Himself to him since no man can see God by himself. One can't know God except by divine self-revelation. No amount of reasoning or mere sense-experiences can lead one to God. In fact, they can't lead one beyond the world. That is the reason why pure rationalism ends up in monism or idealism and pure empiricism ends up in naturalism or some kind of pantheism or polytheism. But Moses had God's revelation. He didn't blind himself against it but submitted to God's revelation and therefore was able to see the glory of God.

2. Seeing means focusing. Moses not only knew God but had his eyes fixed on Him, as we saw earlier. He didn't have any heroes or great men in view before him. He had no models. He just knew God. Of course, he was educated in the Egyptian learning and arts but they couldn't take the place of God in his life. God had given

him a mission and that mission became his bread and drink. Other things didn't matter much to him anymore.

3. Seeing means anticipating. Moses' expectation was from God. He didn't try human methods and means at all. There are a host of man-made programs and devices today that people think are indispensable to ministry. Moses had no political connections, no negotiation charms, and no material means of influencing the world. His only strength and support was God. Therefore, he looked to God in anticipation to fulfill His work and will through him.

4. Seeing means waiting. Moses also waited as he looked towards God. He endured. He knew God had His proper time-table and way of working. He was not hasty. He waited till the ten plagues were over. A leader needs such patience very much. Everyone needs that. The farmer has to wait for the proper season for rain and harvest. The soldier has to wait and endure the training. Moses had to wait on God's timing. He could do that because God's word was always before his eyes. Therefore, he endured.

It was because of such openness to and commitment to God that Moses was able to move on steadfastly in the path chosen for him by God.

FAITH THAT DELIVERS

Finally, the writer says about Moses that "through faith he kept the Passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them" (Heb.11:28). There is no doubt about the fact that this event significantly foreshadowed the crucifixion of Jesus the Lamb of God by which the sins of the world were remitted. Yet, if it were not for Moses' faith, the whole nation of Israel would have also fallen prey to the plague of the death of the firstborn. It is important to understand that leadership comes with greater responsibilities because it is possible for one leader to lead a whole nation either to God or to hell. One has many lessons from history to know how one leader could lead whole nations into great evils, but it is comforting to see that Moses was not disobedient to the divine command. He believed God and saw His salvation revealed for his people.

The Passover and the Exodus

The Passover was one of the most significant feasts of the Old Testament because it portrayed Israel's deliverance from the bondage of Egypt. The feast is that it is a celebration of and not a ritual towards salvation. The most important thing about it was that it was celebrated the first time even before the Israelites were set free. That means that the feast was an event of faith.

The stipulations about the Passover lamb were that it should be without blemish, a male of the first year, taken on the tenth day of the first month and kept until the fourteenth day of the month when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening (Ex. 14:3-6). It was, obviously, not known to Moses or the congregation then that this foreshadowed Jesus Christ. But we can see it now that it did. Jesus was, as this foreshadowed, crucified on the Passover day on the fourteenth day of the month called Abib or Nisan. He was the unblemished Lamb of God by whose sacrifice God has made forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life available for all those who believe. Every act of God's deliverance is related to the work of Christ. If the angel of death didn't touch the firstborn of Israel because they had the blood of the Lamb on their doorposts it was because, the blood foreshadowed the sacrifice of Christ. Moses' faith was not in the blood of the lamb as if it had some magical power in itself; it was on the plan of God's salvation. He sprinkled the blood and applied it to the doorposts because of God's infusing it with salvation-meaning. It was because of God that the blood obtained a salvific character. And, since the lamb was part of the plan as a shadow of Christ, the faith related to the Passover feast was reckoned for righteousness for those who believed.

The writer tells us that Moses kept the Passover by faith. The observance of the Passover involved the killing of the lamb, daubing the posts of the house with its blood, and eating of its meat roasted with fire along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs; all the time bearing in mind to eat it while standing with clothes and shoes on, and a staff in hand, as if ready to go out (Ex. 12: 5-11). It was symbolic of the Exodus, the hurriedness that it depicted: roasted meat, unleavened bread, and traveler's suit on. It also was a departure with reminder of the bitter experiences they had had in

Egypt (the bitter herbs); evidently, the Exodus can never be appreciated adequately without a remembrance the pain they had been undergoing while in bondage. Similarly, a believer can never appreciate well the salvation of God until he is able to see how miserable a life without divine deliverance would be. Moses' faith in keeping the Passover can be seen in the following ways:

1. His abandonment of a life of bondage. By observing the Passover, Moses made a definite break with not only his past, but also with the past of his people. The Passover was a threshold to a newness of life. It symbolized a departure from slavery to men and a returning to the service of God. The Passover completely severed the Israelites ties with Egypt; the yoke of bondage fell to the ground and Egypt had no power left in it to hold Israel in its clutches. It was an annunciation of and proclamation of the redemption of God by faith. The blood talked of death to the world; the unleavened bread talked about sincerity and truth and a newness of life. This breaking off with the old is reiterated by Paul when he asks the Corinthian believers to "purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore, let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1Cor. 5:7-8). The old did pass away as the shadow of death passed from off their homes; the new had begun.

2. His acceptance of the divine means. Moses' observance of it demonstrated his acceptance of God's means of deliverance. The sacrifice of the lamb and other things would have looked weird to others but, though he might have not fully understood it yet, Moses scrupulously followed what God had commanded. He accepted the way chosen by God. The Bible says that the cross of Jesus Christ is foolishness to the philosophers (Greeks) and a stumbling block to the religious (Jews). The philosophers smile at it sarcastically and the religious scholars are offended by its simplicity (or perhaps its severity).⁷⁰ However, to those who accept it, Christ is the power of

⁷⁰ The Buddhists and the Jains would consider the sacrifice a cruel thing because of their belief in *ahimsa* or practice of non-injury to all living beings.

God and the wisdom of God (1Cor. 1:24); for true power is that which can save endlessly and true wisdom is that which shows us the face of Truth. It is not a surprise that the Passover demolished the ancient wisdom and towering might of Egypt in just one night.

3. His activeness in fulfilling the divine command. Moses was prompt to observe the feast. As seen earlier, faith is not faith unless it acts; and the writer of Hebrews constantly emphasizes this fact throughout the chapter. The act of Moses, however, was not just personal. He was a leader and so his action required getting people to do what God had commanded. In fact, his action was meant not just for him but truly for the whole nation of Israel which God wanted to deliver out of the bondage of Egypt. That was the reason why he was sent to that land. While one might not be in the same position as Moses was still it is also true that each one of us is a leader in the sense that we do influence each other; and leadership is influence, as someone said. We are built into a nexus of relationships in a way that whatever we do has an impact on others in some way or the other. As was seen, the faith of Moses' parents did leave something for history: it left a legacy through Moses. Similarly, the Exodus is closely tied with Moses because he chose to obey God. It is important to understand that our actions, no matter how great or how simple they are, have some impact in the scheme of things within our world. But it is the acts of faith that serve to shape the pages of divine history.

The Sprinkling of the Blood

The writer says that through faith Moses kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them. The sprinkling of the blood referred to the taking of the lamb's blood in a basin and sprinkling it upon the lintel and the two side posts of the door of the house with a bunch of hyssop dipped into the blood in the basin. The sprinkling of the blood testifies of many things; few of which are as follows:

1. Blood is the cost of faith. Faith did have a cost and that was the blood of the lamb. It cost the lamb's blood for the house to be protected from the scourge of death that ripped the back of Egypt that night. The lamb had to die for the faith to be active. This foreshadows the sacrifice of Jesus. It was He who by His sacrifice

made faith in Him possible and available for us. In the New Testament, this blood of sprinkling from the sacrifice of our Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ, established the New Covenant (Heb. 12:24) which is a covenant of grace and faith, not a covenant of works. The Old Covenant demanded obedience to the Law in order to be righteous. However, mercy is not absent from justice in the Old Testament and were recurrently see men and women justified not by the works of the Law but by faith. However, this only became possible for them because of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

Now, since this faith cost the blood of the Lamb, who definitely was Christ (though symbolized by the Passover), it was equal to blood itself; which means that the one who puts faith in Christ and is bought by His blood no longer belongs to himself again – his life belongs to Christ (1Cor. 6:20). Therefore, self-denial and spiritual crucifixion is mandatory for discipleship (Mk. 8: 34); because until faith equates the cost, its validity is null. A true disciple, consequently, is a sold property – he belongs to Christ; therefore, his life rests in the hands of his Master.

2. Blood is the sign of faith. The blood had to be daubed on the lintel and posts of the house as sign of the lamb that was slain for the house. It demonstrated the fact that the house belonged to the believers of Jehovah; so that when the angel walked through the land inflicting death to the Egyptians it passed over the house that bore the blood of the lamb. Similarly, it is only by the application of the blood of Jesus over our lives by faith that we are saved from eternal death and the judgment to come. The blood was to be sprinkled with a hyssop which spoke about the purity of the blood and of the fact that salvation is not by any human agency; there were no works of the hands attached to it. It was applied by faith through the Spirit of God (1Cor. 12:3).

Thus, it was by the application of faith that was procured through the sacrifice of the Passover that deliverance and redemption became possible for the Israelites. Moses did lead the people out of Egypt, but he could only do that because of God's mighty arm and His grace over them. God's grace was revealed through His acts and the Israelites basked in it through their faith. The Exodus was one of the most important events in the experience

of the people of God. It depicted the defeat of human wisdom, power, spirituality, and social system. It showed the bankruptcy of the gods of Egypt, the futility of its wisdom, and the paleness of its strength. However, it had great demands over Israel which failed to fulfill them on its wilderness journey. The redemption was obtained at a very great cost. It, first of all, cost the Egyptians their firstborn and also their possessions; then it cost the blood of a lamb for salvation from the judgment and redemption from out of the land. This not only indebted the Israelites to God but made Him their legal owner since He bought them at a great price, and the payment was symbolized by the sanctification of the firstborn for the Lord; later exchanged for the tribe of Levi. They belonged to Him. Therefore, the commandment came to Moses saying:

And it will be, when Jehovah shall bring you into the land of the Canaanites, as He swore to you and to your fathers, and shall give it to you, you shall set apart to Jehovah every one that opens the womb ... all the first-born of man among your sons you shall redeem. And it shall be when your sons asks you in time to come, saying, What is this? you shall say to him, Jehovah brought us out of Egypt by the strength of His hand, from the house of bondage. And it happened when Pharaoh hardened himself against sending us, Jehovah killed all the first-born of the land of Egypt, both the first-born of man, and the first-born of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to Jehovah all that opens the womb, that are males. But all the first-born of my sons I redeem. And it shall be for a token upon your hand, and for frontlets between your eyes. For Jehovah brought us out from Egypt by strength of His hand (Ex. 13:11-16, MKJV).

One can immediately see here that the blood of a mere animal or a lamb could not have equated the blood of all the firstborn of Egypt. However, it symbolized the sacrifice of Jesus who cancelled eternal judgment for us by giving Himself up in our place. Therefore, those who come by faith to Him do not any longer belong to themselves but belong to God.

The Exodus not only sanctified the people of Israel for God but also established them as a testimony of His truth, grace, and power. It disqualified Egyptian spirituality as false, reached out to the people by grace, and brought them out with a powerful arm. Israel had to be a beacon of truth, grace, and power to the world. Instead, it succumbed to the falsehood of idolatry, craving of the flesh, and fear

of the Canaanites; which only led to more pain than joy. God desires His people to walk in truth, love, and fearlessness. Often times, this does become difficult since we are surrounded by the contrary things all the time. However, His blessings never fail to those who adhere to Him in love and obedience through faith. In fact, they have an impact that reverberates through history. Men may come and men may go, empires rise and empires fall, words are written and words erased, thoughts arise and thoughts forgotten, but they who walk by faith and know their God go on forever: the gates of time can't close on them, the whip of darkness recoils away from them, the jaws of death tremble at their sight; this is the saga of the heroes of faith, who belong not to themselves but to the one who rules over their body, soul, and mind, who live not by sight but by faith, who care not for their lives as much as they care for God, who see the invisible, walk in truth, and run with power; “the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits” (Dan. 11:32, NKJV).

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

1. People of faith leave indelible marks on history.
2. A man of faith fears no man.
3. A man of faith doesn't hold on to earthly glories or riches.
4. God rewards faith in the present and will in the age to come.
5. Faith never shrinks back due to doubt or fear; it always keeps moving on.
6. Faith relies on God and not on circumstances.

Conclusion

The journey of faith is marked by transitions of faith-scenes. Each choice of faith is a step forward. Voices and choices fill the avenues of this walk: faith chooses the voice of truth. The light of faith may flicker in the night winds of darkness, but it refuses to blow off; for it is made up of that which is invincible – the eternal Word of God. The faith that is made up of human words dies a mortal death, but the faith flamed by God's own heart will never die. His Word is His heart revealed to us. Therefore, there is nothing so personal about God than His revelation on this earth. His Word may be stern or it may be soft, it may be sweet or may taste bitter; yet, it is His Word that comes from His heart. Therefore, he who has set his heart on the Word of God has set his heart on God. He shall never fail.

Faith is final as the Word is final. It is the evidence. It is beginning and end of all evidences. He who can't recognize the truth of God when he sees it is blind; no amount of evidence will ever convince him. But he whose eyes have been opened sees the light and rejoices in the salvation of God. His Word is self-evidencing and self-disclosing. No man can either close it or disclose it. No knowledge can either prove it or disprove it; for it speaks directly to the spirit of man and commands his obedience. If one can't believe God one can believe in nothing else.

The heroes of faith were not just heroes unto themselves: they were those who combined faith with the Word of God to shape divine history. History is divided into two opposite worlds: the world of faith and the world of rebellion. Evil rules over the world of rebellion and it doesn't know God: its history ends in condemnation and judgment. The world of faith is ruled by the scepter of His Word: it shall abide forever. The world of rebellion ridicules the world of faith; the flesh strives against the Spirit; but truth and light are in the city of God while darkness reigns with curdling chaos in the hearts of unbelievers.

By faith Abel offered a better sacrifice than Cain, and obtained the witness that he was righteous; for Abel believed God for who He was and gave to Him the best of all. But Cain brought the common things to God and was not careful to sanctify Him (or recognize His ultimate distinction) through proper worship. A worship that doesn't sanctify God is abominable before Him; it is idolatry and sin; for God cannot be compared with anyone. Therefore, the Word commands: "Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness" (1Chr. 16:29).

The walk that pleases God is the walk of faith. The Scripture says that Enoch obtained the testimony that he pleased God before he was taken away. Is our life something that pleases God or something that seems to be a burden to Him? Does He rejoice over us or is He hurt by our ways? One can't please God unless one approaches Him in sincerity and truth; one can't approach Him unless one seeks Him; and one can't seek Him unless one believes that He exists and is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. "Seek the LORD, and ye shall live" (Amos 5:6) says the Word. Enoch sought God and obtained a life that is immortal. He never died.

The flood of God's judgment covered the face of the earth with waters; it destroyed everything that had breath in it because the world had corrupted itself with selfishness, pride, and presumption. Unbelief only brings condemnation. But faith has a saving nature. It saved Noah and his family; for by faith he was declared to be righteous and he also condemned the world by his obedience to God. His faith allowed no excuse to the ungodly. It exposed their falsity, condemned their rebellion, and demolished their pride; but it saved those who obeyed.

In his time, Abraham saw human religion at its great heights. The giant Ziggurat at Ur, the temple of Nina, and the curious arts of astrology and witchcraft captivated human hearts. Money flowed in from trade to this commercial city and it had a strong political influence as well. But God took him out of it and called him to be a nation. Abraham never disobeyed God. He was always prompt at His Word. He obtained the heavenly vision and moved out without knowing where he was going. In fact, he did reach the land of Palestine promised to him but never saw it becoming his in his

lifetime. He lived in tents along with his people and family there. He never had a building of his own (except, of course, the tomb that he bought for his wife). Yet, he believed God and drank in every Word that He said; and God imputed it to him as righteousness. Therefore, he is called a friend of God and the father of all believers. The Word tells us that his vision was not limited to this earth; he looked to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Abraham and Sarah believed God for His promises and God blessed them with Isaac in their old age. He believed in hope against hope and she received strength because she counted on God's faithfulness.

Moses' parents never knew what plans God had for their child but by faith they protected him because they saw that he was a proper child. We never know what plans God has for our children; but the eyes of faith recognizes how precious they are in the sight of God and treats them with honor, nurtures them with grace, and brings them up in the fear of the Lord; for faith leaves a legacy through its posterity. Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter because he learnt faith at home. He chose to suffer for Christ rather than enjoy the transient pleasures of sin. Anything separated from God is sin, for nothing can be holy apart from God. He looked to the treasures that are hid in Christ. By faith he forsook Egypt and was not afraid of Pharaoh's wrath, for nothing less than God can terrify the man who trusts in God. So, he endured as one seeing the invisible One. He led his people in the observance of the Passover and saved them from the angel of death. The magicians and armies of Egypt fell asunder before the might of Jehovah as this man of faith spoke on God's behalf. A nation was redeemed, a promise fulfilled, and history was made when Egypt shook off Israel from its clutches after being scourged by God.

The story of the heroes of faith doesn't end here. The writer goes on to speak of the Israelites, of Rahab, of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets: "who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.

Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented – of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth" (Heb. 11: 33-37, NKJV). Perhaps, these latter descriptions might not look heroic but the heroes of faith are not heroes because they look successful in human eyes; they are heroes because they triumph in faith and endure to the end: their faith is not broken by any power of man or the enemy. And what does this all encourage us to? Obviously, to be unshaken in our faith in God no matter how hard the rough winds of the world blow against us: the house built upon the rock shall stand. The writer of Hebrews calls these heroes or warriors of faith as "a cloud of witnesses" that surrounds us. The scene painted here is that of a stadium; however, the runners (which are the believers) are not just surrounded by mere spectators: they are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses (*martus*) who inspire and challenge them to move forward towards the goal. Faith not only saves the one who believes; it also inspires, impacts, and influences others.

Pages can be filled with stories, messages, illustrations, and testimonies of faith. However, it is more blessed to live it than to merely talk about or even just listen about faith. Faith without truth and faith without action, both are futile. One must believe in the truth. There are some who just try to believe in faith (idolizing it) and preach a gospel of optimism about self-invented dreams and visions. However, faith is not at all about them. It is related to the truth of God's revelation. A mountain of faith in something God has not revealed cannot move a mustard seed; but a mustard seed of faith in something God has spoken can move a mountain. Thus, faith, truth, and action are related. Faith also works by love, for God is love and He who conforms to the Word of His heart will inevitably conform to His heart. This also means that faith is spiritual as the Word clearly implies when it states that the things of God are spiritually discerned (1Cor. 2:14) and that we walk by faith and not by sight (2Cor. 5:7). Therefore, it is also mentioned as both the gift of the Spirit (1Cor. 12:9) and the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). This

remarkably differs from the imaginations and presuppositions of the human heart. It comes from God as a gift with the Word of the Spirit that He gives to us; and so, it has fruits unto everlasting life. Faith is that which defines our identity and relationship with God. To sum it all up in the words of the writer of Hebrews itself: “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6, NKJV).

The heart of faith has no presumption,
It simply trusts His Word.

It stands secure, and in His Promise
Finds eternal worth.

The eyes of faith will never tire,
Though deeper gets the night;
They hope ignited by the fire
Of God’s Eternal Light.

The dreams of faith are dreams of glory;
Not earthly name or fame.
A child may write another history,
If he’s of God ne’er ashamed.

Faith will worship God forever;
For faith alone, in truth, sees Him.
Faith is an unceasing river
Of praise and worship to the King.

Faith listens and faith obeys,
Faith moves on and never stays,
Faith is strong and faith grows stronger
And never falters in His ways.

Faith offers its all to God
Not a thing to itself left;
For faith’s true rest and meaning
Are in the bosom of His chest.

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